Aunt Jane's Nieces At Work

EDITH VAN DYNE

E.A.NELSON

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/auntjanesniecesa0000edit

AUNT JANE'S NIECES AT WORK

AUNT JANE'S NIECES AT WORK

BY

EDITH VAN DYNE

AUTHOR OF "AUNT JANE'S NIECES," "AUNT JANE'S NIECES ABROAD," "AUNT JANE'S NIECES AT MILLVILLE," ETC.

The Reilly & Lee Co.

Chicago

COPYRIGHT, 1909
BY
THE REILLY & BRITTON CO.

LIST OF CHAPTERS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Miss Doyle Interferes	7
II	The Artist	20
III	Don Quixote	33
IV	Kenneth Takes a Bold Step	46
V	Planning the Work	57
VI	A Good Host	73
VII	Patsy Makes Progress	86
VIII	The Honorable Erastus is Astonished	101
IX	Ol' Will Rogers	119
X	The Forged Check	133
XI	A Mysterious Disappearance	147
XII	Beth Meets a Rebuff	160
XIII	The Boomerang	172
XIV	Lucy's Ghost	184
XV	Signs of the Times	196
XVI	A Clew at Last	212
XVII	Mrs. Hopkins Gossips	230
XVIII	Eliza Parsons	240
XIX	Patsy Indulges in Eavesdropping	257
XX	Pricking a Bubble	266
XXI	The "Returns" from Fairview	282
XXII	The Awakening	290

AUNT JANE'S NIECES AT WORK

CHAPTER I

MISS DOYLE INTERFERES

"Daddy," said Patricia Doyle at the breakfast table in her cosy New York apartment, "here is something that will make you sit up and take notice."

"My dear Patsy," was the reply, "it's already sitting up I am, an' taking waffles. If anything at all would make me take notice it's your own pretty phiz."

"Major," remarked Uncle John, helping himself to waffles from a fresh plate Nora brought in, "you Irish are such confirmed flatterers that you flatter your own daughters. Patsy isn't at all pretty this morning. She's too red and freckled."

Patsy laughed and her blue eyes danced.

"That comes from living on your old farm at Millville," she retorted. "We've only been back three days, and the sunburn sticks to me like a burr to a kitten."

"Pay no attention to the ould rascal, Patsy," advised the Major, composedly. "An' stop wavin' that letter like a white flag of surrender. Who's it from?"

"Kenneth."

"Aha! An' how is our lad?"

"Why, he's got himself into a peck of trouble. That's what I want to talk to you and Uncle John about," she replied, her happy face growing as serious as it could ever become.

"Can't he wiggle out?" asked Uncle John.

"Out of what?"

"His trouble."

"It seems not. Listen—"

"Oh, tell us about it, lassie," said the Major. "If I judge right there's some sixty pages in that epistle. Don't bother to read it again."

"But every word is important," declared Patsy,

turning the letter over, "—except the last page," with a swift flush.

Uncle John laughed. His shrewd old eyes saw everything.

"Then read us the last page, my dear."

"I'll tell you about it," said Patsy, quickly. "It's this way, you see. Kenneth has gone into politics!"

"More power to his elbow!" exclaimed the Major.

"I can't imagine it in Kenneth," said Uncle John, soberly. "What's he in for?"

"For—for—let's see. Oh, here it is. For member of the House of Representatives from the Eighth District."

"He's flying high, for a fledgling," observed the Major. "But Kenneth's a bright lad and a big gun in his county. He'll win, hands down."

Patsy shook her head.

"He's afraid not," she said, "and it's worrying him to death. He doesn't like to be beaten, and that's what's troubling him."

Uncle John pushed back his chair.

"Poor boy!" he said. "What ever induced him to attempt such a thing?"

"He wanted to defeat a bad man who now represents Kenneth's district," explained Patsy, whose wise little head was full of her friend's difficulties; "and—"

"And the bad man objects to the idea and won't be defeated," added the Major. "It's a way these bad men have."

Uncle John was looking very serious indeed, and Patsy regarded him gratefully. Her father never would be serious where Kenneth was concerned. Perhaps in his heart the grizzled old Major was a bit jealous of the boy.

"I think," said the girl, "that Mr. Watson got Ken into politics, for he surely wouldn't have undertaken such a thing himself. And, now he's in, he finds he's doomed to defeat; and it's breaking his heart, Uncle John."

The little man nodded silently. His chubby face was for once destitute of a smile. That meant a good deal with Uncle John, and Patsy knew she had interested him in Kenneth's troubles.

"Once," said the Major, from behind the morning paper, "I was in politics, meself. I ran for coroner an' got two whole votes—me own an' the undertaker's. It's because the public's so indiscriminating that I've not run for anything since—except th' street-car."

"But it's a big game," said Uncle John, standing at the window with his hands deep in his pockets; "and an important game. Every good American should take an interest in politics; and Kenneth, especially, who has such large landed interests, ought to direct the political affairs of his district."

"I'm much interested in politics, too, Uncle," declared the girl. "If I were a man I'd—I'd—be President!"

"An' I'd vote fer ye twenty times a day, mavourneen!" cried the Major. "But luckily ye'll be no president—unless it's of a woman's club."

"There's the bell!" cried Patsy. "It must be the girls. No one else would call so early."

"It's Beth's voice, talking to Nora," added her father, listening; and then the door flew open and in came two girls whose bright and eager

faces might well warrant the warm welcome they received.

"Oh, Louise," cried Patsy, "however did you get up so early?"

"I've got a letter from Kenneth," was the answer, "and I'm so excited I couldn't wait a minute!"

"Imagine Louise being excited," said Beth, calmly, as she kissed Uncle John and sat down by Patsy's side. "She read her letter in bed and bounced out of bed like a cannon-ball. We dressed like the 'lightning change' artist at the vaudeville, and I'm sure our hats are not on straight."

"This bids fair to be a strenuous day," observed the Major. "Patsy's had a letter from the boy, herself."

"Oh, did you?" inquired Louise; "and do you know all about it, dear?"

"She knows sixty pages about it," replied Major Doyle.

"Well, then, what's to be done?"

The question was addressed to Patsy, who was not prepared to reply. The three cousins first ex-

changed inquiring glances and then turned their eager eyes upon the broad chubby back of Uncle John, who maintained his position at the window as if determined to shut out the morning sunlight.

Louise Merrick lived with her mother a few blocks away from Patsy's apartment, and her cousin Beth DeGraf was staying with her for a time. They had all spent the summer with Uncle John at Millville, and had only returned to New York a few days before. Beth's home was in Ohio, but there was so little sympathy between the girl and her parents that she was happy only when away from them. Her mother was Uncle John's sister, but as selfish and cold as Uncle John was generous and genial. Beth's father was a "genius" and a professor of music—one of those geniuses who live only in their own atmosphere and forget there is a world around them. So Beth had a loveless and disappointed childhood, and only after Uncle John arrived from the far west and took his three nieces "under his wing," as he said, did her life assume any brightness or interest.

Her new surroundings, however, had developed Beth's character wonderfully, and although she still had her periods of sullen depression she was generally as gay and lovable as her two cousins, but in a quieter and more self-possessed way.

Louise was the eldest—a fair, dainty creature with that indescribable "air" which invariably wins the admiring regard of all beholders. Whatever gown the girl wore looked appropriate and becoming, and her manner was as delightful as her appearance. She was somewhat frivolous and designing in character, but warm-hearted and staunch in her friendships. Indeed, Louise was one of those girls who are so complex as to be a puzzle to everyone, including themselves.

Beth DeGraf was the beauty of the group of three, and she also possessed great depth of character. Beth did not like herself very well, and was always afraid others would fail to like her; so she did not win friends as easily as did Louise. But those who knew the beautiful girl intimately could read much to admire in the depths of her great dark eyes, and she was not the least interesting of the three nieces whose fortunes had

been so greatly influenced by Aunt Jane and Uncle John Merrick.

But Patricia Doyle—usually called "Patsy" by her friends—was after all the general favorite with strangers and friends alike. There was a subtile magnetism about the girl's laughing, freckled face and dancing blue eyes that could not well be resisted. Patsy was not beautiful; she was not accomplished; she had no especial air of distinction. But she was winning from the top of her red hair to the tips of her toes, and so absolutely unaffected that she won all hearts.

"And for wisdom she's got Solomon beat to a frazzle," declared the Major to Uncle John, in discussing his daughter's character. But it is possible that Major Doyle was prejudiced.

"Well, what's to be done?" demanded Louise, for the second time.

"We don't vote in Ken's district," remarked the Major, "or there would be six votes to his credit, and that would beat my own record by four!"

"Ken is so impressionable that I'm afraid this defeat will ruin his life," said Beth, softly. "I

wish we could get him away. Couldn't we get him to withdraw?"

"He might be suddenly called to Europe," suggested Louise. "That would take him away from the place and give him a change of scene."

Patsy shook her head.

"Kenneth isn't a coward," she said. "He won't run away. He must accept his defeat like a man, and some time try again. Eh, Uncle John?"

Uncle John turned around and regarded his three nieces critically.

"What makes you think he will be defeated?" he asked.

"He says so himself," answered Patsy.

"He writes me he can see no hope, for the people are all against him," added Louise.

"Pah!" said Uncle John, contemptuously. "What else does the idiot say?"

"That he's lonely and discouraged, and had to pour out his heart to some one or go wild," said Patsy, the tears of sympathy filling her eyes.

"And you girls propose to sit down and allow all this?" inquired their uncle sternly.

"We?" answered Louise, lifting her brows

and making a pretty gesture. "What can we do?"

"Go to work!" said Uncle John.

"How?" asked Patsy, eagerly.

"Politics is a game," declared Mr. Merrick. "It's never won until the last card is played. And success doesn't lie so much in the cards as the way you play 'em. Here are three girls with plenty of shrewdness and energy. Why don't you take a hand in the game and win it?"

"Oh, Uncle John!"

The proposition was certainly disconcerting at first.

"Yes, yes!" laughed the Major, derisively. "Put on some blue stockings, read the history of woman's suffrage, cultivate a liking for depraved eggs, and then face Kenneth's enraged constituents!"

"I shouldn't mind, daddy, if it would help Kenneth any," declared Patsy, stoutly.

"Go on, Uncle John," said Beth, encouragingly.

"Women in politics," observed their uncle, "have often been a tremendous power. You

won't need to humiliate yourselves, my dears. All you'll need to do is to exercise your wits and work earnestly for the cause. There are a hundred ways to do that."

"Mention a few," proposed the Major.

"I will when I get to Elmhurst and look over the ground," answered Uncle John.

"You're going on, then?"

"Yes."

"I'll go with you," said Patsy promptly.

"So will I," said Beth. "Kenneth needs moral encouragement and support as much as anything else, just now."

"He's imagining all sorts of horrors and making himself miserable," said Louise. "Let's all go, Uncle, and try to cheer him up."

By this time Uncle John was smiling genially.

"Why, I was sure of you, my dears, from the first," he said. "The Major's an old croaker, but he'd go, too, if it were not necessary for him to stay in New York and attend to business. But we mustn't lose any time, if we're going to direct the politics of the Eighth District. Election's the eighth of November."

"I can go any time, and so can Beth," said Louise.

"All I need is the blue stockings," laughed Patsy.

"It won't be play. This means work," said Uncle John seriously.

"Well, I believe we're capable of a certain amount of work," replied Beth. "Aren't we, girls?"

"We are!"

"All right," said Mr. Merrick. "I'll go and look up the next train. Go home, Louise, and pack up. I'll telephone you."

"That bad man 'd better look out," chuckled the Major. "He doesn't suspect that an army of invasion is coming."

"Daddy," cried Patsy, "you hush up. We mean business."

"If you win," said the Major, "I'll run for alderman on a petticoat platform, and hire your services."

CHAPTER II

THE ARTIST

To most people the great rambling mansion at Elmhurst, with its ample grounds and profusion of flowers and shrubbery, would afford endless delight. But Kenneth Forbes, the youthful proprietor, was at times dreadfully bored by the loneliness of it all, though no one could better have appreciated the beauties of his fine estate.

The town, an insignificant village, was five miles distant, and surrounding the mansion were many broad acres which rather isolated it from its neighbors. Moreover, Elmhurst was the one important estate in the county, and the simple, hard-working farmers in its vicinity considered, justly enough, that the owner was wholly out of their class.

This was not the owner's fault, and Kenneth had brooded upon the matter until he had come to regard it as a distinct misfortune. For it isolated him and deprived him of any social intercourse with his neighbors.

The boy had come to live at Elmhurst when he was a mere child, but only as a dependent upon the charities of Aunt Jane, who had accepted the charge of the orphan because he was a nephew of her dead lover, who had bequeathed her his estate of Elmhurst. Aunt Jane was Kenneth's aunt merely in name, since she had never even married the uncle to whom she had been betrothed, and who had been killed in an accident before the boy was born.

She was an irritable old woman, as Kenneth knew her, and had never shown him any love or consideration. He grew up in a secluded corner of the great house, tended merely by servants and suffered to play in those quarters of the ample grounds which Aunt Jane did not herself visit. The neglect which Kenneth had suffered and his lonely life had influenced the youth's temperament, and he was far from being

an agreeable companion at the time Aunt Jane summoned her three nieces to Elmhurst in order to choose one of them as her heiress. These girls, bright, cheery and wholesome as they were, penetrated the boy's reserve and drew him out of his misanthropic moods. They discovered that he had remarkable talent as an artist, and encouraged him to draw and paint, something he had long loved to do in secret.

Then came the great surprise of the boy's life, which changed his condition from one of dependency into affluence. Aunt Jane died and it was discovered that she had no right to transfer the estate to one of her nieces, because by the terms of his uncle's deed to her the property reverted on her death to Kenneth himself. Louise Merrick, Beth DeGraf and Patsy Doyle, the three nieces, were really glad that the boy inherited Elmhurst, and returned to their eastern homes with the most cordial friendship existing between them all.

Kenneth was left the master of Elmhurst and possessor of considerable wealth besides, and at first he could scarcely realize his good fortune

or decide how to take advantage of it. He had one good and helpful friend, an old lawyer named Watson, who had not only been a friend of his uncle, and the confidant of Aunt Jane for years, but had taken an interest in the lonely boy and had done his best to make his life brighter and happier.

When Kenneth became a landed proprietor Mr. Watson was appointed his guardian, and the genial old lawyer abandoned the practice of law and henceforth devoted himself to his ward's welfare and service.

They made a trip to Europe together, where Kenneth studied the pictures of the old masters and obtained instruction from some of the foremost living artists of the old world.

It was while they were abroad, a year before the time of this story, that the boy met Aunt Jane's three nieces again. They were "doing" Europe in company with a wealthy bachelor uncle, John Merrick, a generous, kind-hearted and simple-minded old gentleman who had taken the girls "under his wing," as he expressed it, and had really provided for their worldly welfare

better than Aunt Jane, his sister, could have done.

This "Uncle John" was indeed a whimsical character, as the reader will presently perceive. Becoming a millionaire "against his will," as he declared, he had learned to know his nieces late in life, and found in their society so much to enjoy that he was now wholly devoted to their interests. His one friend was Major Doyle, Patsy's father, a dignified but agreeable old Irish gentleman who amused Uncle John nearly as much as the girls delighted him. The Major managed John Merrick's financial affairs, leaving the old millionaire free to do as he pleased.

So he took the girls to Europe, and the four had a fine, adventurous trip, as may be imagined. Kenneth and Mr. Watson met them in Sicily, and afterward in the Italian cities, and the friendship already existing between the young people was more firmly cemented than before.

In the spring Kenneth returned with his guardian to Elmhurst, where he devoted himself largely to painting from the sketches he had made

abroad, while Mr. Watson sat beside him comfortably smoking his pipe and reading his favorite authors. The elder man was contented enough in his condition, but the boy grew restless and impatient, and longed for social intercourse. His nature was moody and he had a tendency to brood if left much to himself.

Uncle John had carried his nieces to a farm at Millville, in the Adirondack region, for the summer, so that Kenneth heard but seldom from his friends.

Such was the disposition of the characters when our story opens.

Kenneth Forbes, although I have called him a boy, had attained his majority on the fifteenth day of May. At this time Mr. Watson rendered his accounts and turned over the estate to its owner. He would then have retired, but Kenneth would not let him go. Twenty-one years of age sounds mature, but the owner of Elmhurst was as boyish and inexperienced as it is possible for one twenty-one years old to be. He had grown accustomed, moreover, to depend much on Mr. Watson's legal acumen in the manage-

ment of his affairs, and would have been embarrassed and bewildered if obliged to shoulder the burden all at once.

The lawyer, who had always had an affection for the young man, perceived this clearly; so an arrangement was made that he should remain with his young friend indefinitely and strive to teach him such elements of business as would enable him in time to attend to his extensive interests understandingly and wisely.

The country around Elmhurst is thickly settled with agriculturists, for the farms are rich and productive in that part of the state. But it is not a flat country, and Nature has given it many pretty woodland glades and rocky glens to add to its charm.

From the hill country at the west came several rushing streams which tumbled along rocky paths to the river nine miles below Elmhurst, and there are scenes along these routes that might well delight the eye of an artist. Kenneth had often wandered into these out-of-the-way places when a half-forgotten, neglected lad, but had not visited them for years. Now, however, with

the spirit of loneliness upon him, he suddenly thought of a glen that would make an interesting study for a picture; so one morning he mounted his horse and rode away to pay the place a preliminary visit.

The farmers along the road nodded at the young fellow good-naturedly as he passed them. Everyone knew him well by sight, yet Kenneth could not have named many of his neighbors, having held little intercourse with them. It struck him, this morning, that they had little cause to be interested in him. He had been an unsociable lad, and since he had become master of Elmhurst had done little to cultivate acquaintance with the people who lived around him.

One reason for this was that they held little in common with him. The neighboring farmers were honest, thrifty souls, and among them were many both shrewd and thoughtful; but they naturally would not force themselves upon the society of the one really rich man in their community, especially as that man had shown no desire to know them.

Kenneth was the subject of much speculation among them, and opinions widely differed concerning his character. Some called him a "prig" and declared that he was "stuck up" and conceited. Others said he was a "namby-pamby" without brains or wit. But there were a few who had occasionally talked with the boy, who understood him better, and hinted that he might develop into "quite a man" in time.

Kenneth surprised himself this morning by greeting several of his neighbors with unusual cordiality. He even stopped a man who was driving along the highway to inquire about his horse, which he perceived was very lame. The boy knew something about horses and suggested a method of treatment that he thought would help the nag; a suggestion the farmer received with real gratitude.

This simple incident cheered Kenneth more than you might suppose, and he was actually whistling as he rode through the glen, where the country road wound its way beside the noisy, rushing stream.

Pausing in front of the picturesque "table

rock" that he had come to inspect, the boy uttered an exclamation of chagrin and disappointment. Painted broadly upon the face of the rock, in great white letters, was the advertisement of a patent medicine. The beauty of the scene was ruined—only the glaring advertisement caught and held the eye of the observer.

At first Kenneth's mind held only a feeling of disgust that such a desecration of Nature's gifts to humanity should be allowed. Then he remembered another place further along the glen which was almost as pretty as this had been before the defiling brush of the advertiser had ruined it. So he spurred his horse and rode up the winding way to the spot. There a red-lettered announcement of "Simpson's Soap" stared him in the face.

This was too much for his temper, and his disappointment quickly turned to resentment. While he sat on his mare, considering the matter, the man with the lame horse, whom he had passed, overtook him.

"Can you tell me," Kenneth asked, "who owns this property?"

"Why, I do," replied the man, reining up.

"And you permitted these vile signs to be painted on the rocks?" demanded the boy angrily.

"O' course," replied the man, with a grin of amusement. "I can't farm the rocks, can I? An' these 'ere signs pays me ten dollars a year, each."

Kenneth groaned.

"I'll give you fifteen dollars a year each if you'll let me wash off the letters and restore the scene to its original beauty," he declared.

"I'm willin'," was the response. "But ye see they're contracted. I'd git into trouble with the sign-painter."

"Who is he?"

"Lives in Cleveland. I've got his name up t' th' house, if you'll come along. He comes up here every spring and paints fences an' rocks, payin' spot cash fer th' privilege."

"Oh, I see."

"Then he contracts with the soap man an' the medicine man to paint up their ads. You're the young 'un from Elmhurst, ain't ye?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'd like to earn that extra five, well enough. My name's Parsons. I've got three signs let on my property in the glen. Ef ye'll jest ride up t' the house I'll giv' ye the feller's name."

"All right. Come along," said Kenneth, with sudden resolve.

The farmer rode a time in silent thought. He could not go fast, for the beast was very lame. Finally he remarked:

"Ef ye buy up the sign painters, so's ye can wash off the letters, like enough ye'll hev to pay him fer th' paint an' paintin', too."

"I don't mind," was the response.

The farmer chuckled. Here was an interesting adventure, for a fact. What on earth could possess the "young 'un" from Elmhurst to object to signs, and be willing to pay for having them erased?

"Like enough ye'll hev to pay back the money the soap an' medicine men guv th' painter, too," he hazarded.

"Like enough," said Kenneth, grimly.

One of his stubborn moods had seized him. At all hazards he was resolved to eliminate those ugly signs.

He got the name of the sign painter, accepted a glass of buttermilk at the farm house, and then rode slowly home by another route, so that he might not have to face the signs again.

But on this route he saw even more. They were painted on the fences and barns as he passed along. He scowled at each one, but they did not appear to him quite so inharmonious as those which marred the more picturesque and retired spots which were his favorite haunts.

CHAPTER III

DON QUIXOTE

When Kenneth got home he told Mr. Watson of his discovery and asked the old gentleman to write to the sign painter and find out what could be done. The lawyer laughed heartily at his young friend's whim, but agreed to help him.

"If you are going to try to prevent rural advertising," he remarked, "you'll find your hands full."

Kenneth looked up smiling.

"Thank you," he said.

"For what?"

"For finding me something to do. I'm sick of this inaction."

Again the lawyer laughed.

"What is your idea?" he asked.

"To remove such eyesores as advertising signs from the neighborhood of Elmhurst."

"It's a Titan's task, Ken."

"So much the better."

The lawyer grew thoughtful.

"I believe it's impossible," he ventured.

"Better yet. I don't say I'll succeed, but I promise to try. I want something to occupy myself—something really difficult, so that I may test my own powers."

"But, my dear boy! This foolish proposition isn't worthy your effort. If you want to be up and doing we'll find something else to occupy your mind."

"No, Mr. Watson; I'm set on this. It's a crime to allow these signs to flaunt themselves in our prettiest scenes. My instinct revolts at the desecration. Besides, no one else seems to have undertaken the task of exterminating them."

"True enough. If you're serious, Ken, I'll frankly say the thing can't be done. You may, perhaps, buy the privilege of maintaining the rocks of the glen free from advertising; but

the advertisers will paint more signs on all the approaches, and you won't have gained much."

"I'll drive every advertising sign out of this country."

"Impossible. The great corporations who control these industries make their fortunes by this style of advertising. The rural districts are their strongholds. And they must advertise or they can't sell their products."

"Let them advertise in decent ways, then. What right has any soap maker to flaunt his wares in my face, whether I'm interested in them or not?"

"The right of custom. People have submitted to these things so long that the manufacturers consider themselves justified in covering every barn, rock and fence with their signs. I see no way to stop them."

"Nor I, at present. But there must be a way."

"Drive out one, and another will take his place. They pay liberally for locations—"

"Pshaw! Ten dollars a year for a rock as big as a barn!"

"But they rent thousands of such positions,

and in the aggregate our farmers get large sums from them."

"And ruin the appearance of their homes and farms."

Mr. Watson smiled.

"They're not artists, Ken. They can't realize on appearances, but they can use the money the signs bring them."

"They need to be educated, that's all. These farmers seem very honest, decent fellows."

"They are, Ken. I wish you knew them better."

"So do I, Mr. Watson. This campaign ought to bring us closer together, for I mean to get them to help me."

"You'll have to buy them, I'm afraid."

"Not all of them. There must be some refinement among them."

But the lawyer was not convinced. However, it was not his desire to stifle this new-born enthusiasm of Kenneth's, even though he believed it misdirected. He wanted the young man to rouse himself and take an interest in life, and if his antagonism to advertising signs would effect

this, the futile fight against them was to be welcomed. It would cost the boy something, but he would gain his money's worth in experience.

After a few days the sign painter answered the letter. He would relinquish the three signs in the glen for a payment of fifty dollars each, with the understanding that no other competing signs were to take their place. Kenneth promptly mailed a check for the amount demanded and early next morning started for the glen with what he called his "eliminators."

These "eliminators" consisted of two men with cans of turpentine and gasoline and an equipment of scrubbing brushes. Parsons, the farmer, came over to watch this novel proceeding, happy in the possession of three crisp five-dollar notes given in accordance with the agreement made with him. All day the two men scrubbed the rocks faithfully, assisted at odd times by their impatient employer; but the thick splashes of paint clung desperately to the rugged surface of the rock, and the task was a hard one. When evening came the letters had almost dis-

appeared when viewed closely; but when Kenneth rode to the mouth of the glen on his way home and paused to look back, he could see the injunction "Take Smith's Liver Pills" staring at him, in grim defiance of the scrubbing brushes.

But his energy was not exhausted. No one ever knew what it cost in labor and material to erase those three signs; but after ten days they had vanished completely, and the boy heaved a sigh of satisfaction and turned his attention to extending the campaign.

On the farm nearest to Elmhurst at the north, which belonged to a man named Webb, was a barn, facing the road, that displayed on its side a tobacco sign. Kenneth interviewed Mr. Webb and found that he received no money for the sign; but the man contended that the paint preserved his barn from the weather on that side. So Kenneth agreed to repaint the entire barn for him, and actually had the work done. As it took many coats of paint to blot out the sign it was rather a expensive operation.

By this time the campaign of the youthful proprietor of Elmhurst against advertising signs

began to be talked of throughout the county, and was the subject of much merriment among the farmers. Some of them were intelligent enough to admire the young Quixote, and acknowledged frankly that it was a pity to decorate their premises with signs of patent medicines and questionable soaps.

But the majority of them sneered at the champion, and many refused point-blank to consider any proposition to discard the advertisements. Indeed, some were proud of them, and believed it a mark of distinction to have their fences and sheds announce an eye-remedy or several varieties of pickles.

Mr. Watson, at first an amused observer of the campaign, soon became indignant at the way that Kenneth was ridiculed and reviled; and he took a hand in the fight himself. He decided to call a meeting of the neighboring farmers at the district school-house on Saturday night, where Kenneth could address them with logical arguments and endeavor to win them over to his way of thinking.

The invitation was promptly accepted by the

rural population; not so much because they were interested in the novel ideas of the young artist as because they expected to be amused by hearing the boyish master of Elmhurst "lecture at 'em." So they filled the little room to overflowing, and to add to the dignity of the proceedings the Hon. Erastus Hopkins, State Representative for the district, lent his presence to the assemblage.

Not that the Honorable Erastus cared a fig about this foolish talk of exterminating advertising signs. He was himself a large stockholder in a breakfast-food factory, which painted signs wherever it could secure space. These signs were not works of art, but they were distinctly helpful to business, and only a fool, in the opinion of the Honorable Erastus, would protest against the inevitable.

What brought the legislator to the meeting was the fact that he was coming forward for re-election in November, and believed that this afforded a good chance to meet some of his constituents and make a favorable impression. So he came early and shook hands with everyone

that arrived, and afterward took as prominent a seat as possible.

Indeed, the gathering had at first the appearance of being a political one, so entirely did the Representative dominate it. But Mr. Watson took the platform and shyly introduced the speaker of the evening.

The farmers all knew Mr. Watson, and liked him; so when Kenneth rose they prepared to listen in respectful silence.

Usually a young man making his maiden speech is somewhat diffident; but young Forbes was so thoroughly in earnest and so indignant at the opposition that his plans had encountered that he forgot that it was his first public speech and thought only of impressing his hearers with his views, exulting in the fact that on this occasion they could not "talk back," as they usually did in private when he tried to argue with them. So he exhorted them earnestly to keep their homes beautiful and free from the degradation of advertising, and never to permit glaring commercialism to mar the scenery around them. He told them what he had been able to accom-

plish by himself, in a short time; how he had redeemed the glen from its disgraceful condition and restored it to its former beauty. He asked them to observe Webb's pretty homestead, no longer marred by the unsightly sign upon the barn. And then he appealed to them to help him in driving all the advertising signs out of the community.

When he ended they applauded his speech mildly; but it was chiefly for the reason that he had spoken so forcibly and well.

Then the Honorable Erastus Hopkins, quick to catch the lack of sympathy in the audience, stood up and begged leave to reply to young Forbes.

He said the objection to advertising signs was only a rich man's aristocratic hobby, and that it could not be indulged in a democratic community of honest people. His own firm, he said, bought thousands of bushels of oats from the farmers and converted them into the celebrated Eagle-Eye Breakfast Food, three packages for a quarter. They sold this breakfast food to thousands of farmers, to give them health and

strength to harvest another crop of oats. Thus he "benefited the community going and coming." What! Should he not advertise this mutual benefit commodity wherever he pleased, and especially among the farmers? What aristocratic notion could prevent him? It was a mighty good thing for the farmers to be reminded, by means of the signs on their barns and fences, of the things they needed in daily life.

If the young man at Elmhurst would like to be of public service he might find some better way to do so than by advancing such crazy ideas. But this, continued the Representative, was a subject of small importance. What he wished especially to call their attention to was the fact that he had served the district faithfully as Representative, and deserved their suffrages for renomination. And then he began to discuss political questions in general and his own merits in particular, so that Kenneth and Mr. Watson, disgusted at the way in which the Honorable Erastus had captured the meeting, left the schoolhouse and indignantly returned to Elmhurst.

"This man Hopkins," said Mr. Watson, angrily, "is not a gentleman. He's an impertinent meddler."

"He ruined any good effect my speech might have created," said Kenneth, gloomily.

"Give it up, my boy," advised the elder man, laying a kindly hand on the youth's shoulder. "It really isn't worth the struggle."

"But I can't give it up and acknowledge myself beaten," protested Kenneth, almost ready to weep with disappointment.

"Well, well, let's think it over, Ken, and see what can be done. Perhaps that rascally Hopkins was right when he advised you to find some other way to serve the community."

"I can't do better than to make it clean—to do away with these disreputable signs," said the boy, stubbornly.

"You made a fine speech," declared Mr. Watson, gravely puffing his pipe. "I am very proud of you, my lad."

Kenneth flushed red. He was by nature shy and retiring to a degree. Only his pent-up enthusiasm had carried him through the ordeal,

and now that it was over he was chagrined to think that the speech had been so ineffective. He was modest enough to believe that another speaker might have done better.

CHAPTER IV

KENNETH TAKES A BOLD STEP

"This man Hopkins gets on my nerves," said Mr. Watson, a week or two after the eventful meeting in the school-house. He was at the breakfast table opposite Kenneth, and held up a big, glaring post-card which was in his mail.

"What is it now?" asked the boy, rousing himself from a fit of abstraction.

"An announcement offering himself for renomination at the primaries. It's like a circus advertisement. Isn't it a shame to think that modern politics has descended to such a level in our free and enlightened republic?"

Kenneth nodded, stirring his coffee thoughtfully. He had lost his spirit and enthusiasm since the meeting, and was fast relapsing into his old state of apathy and boredom. It grieved Mr. Watson to note this.

"Hopkins isn't fit to be the Representative for this district," observed the old gentleman, with sudden energy.

The boy looked at him.

"Who is Hopkins?" he asked.

"His mother once kept a stationery shop in town, and he was stable boy at the hotel. But he was shrewd and prospered, and when he grew up became a county-clerk or tax-collector; then an assessor, and finally he ran last term for State Representative from this district and was elected by a mighty small majority."

"Why small?" asked Kenneth.

"Because he's a Democrat, and the district is strongly Republican. But Thompson ran against him on the Republican ticket and couldn't win his party vote."

"Who's Thompson?"

"The general store keeper. He has a reputation for short weights and measures."

The boy sipped his coffee thoughtfully.

"Tell me, sir; how did you happen to know all this?" he asked.

"I've been looking up Hopkins's record. I

have disliked the man ever since he treated us so shabbily on the night of the meeting."

"Never mind him. We've done with him."

Mr. Watson shifted uneasily in his chair.

"I wonder if we have?" he said.

"Why not, sir?"

"Well, Kenneth, we have to reside at Elmhurst, which is Hopkins's district. Also I believe Elmhurst to be the most important estate in the district, and you to be the largest taxpayer. This man wishes to go to the State Legislature and make laws for you to obey."

"Well?"

"Well, it's our duty to watch him. If he isn't a fit man it's our duty to prevent him from representing us."

The young man nodded somewhat dreamily.

"Some of these country yokels must represent us," he observed. "It doesn't matter much whether it's Hopkins or someone else."

"Except that you, being a prominent man, owe it to the community to protect its interests," added the lawyer.

"Do you want me to mix in these petty politics?" asked the boy, irritably.

"Oh, do as you like, my boy. If you can shirk your duties with a clear conscience, I've nothing to say."

For a time the young man was silent. Finally he asked:

"Why isn't Hopkins a good Representative?"

"He's what is called a 'grafter'; a term signifying that he is willing to vote for any measure that he is paid to vote for, whether it benefits his constituents or not."

"Oh. Is he singular in this?"

"By no means. The 'grafter' is all too common in politics."

Again the boy fell into a thoughtful mood.

"Mr. Watson, am I a Democrat or a Republican?"

The old gentleman laughed outright.

"Don't you know, Ken?"

"No, sir, I haven't asked myself before."

"Then I advise you to be a Republican."

"Why?"

"Because Hopkins is a Democrat, and we may then fight him openly."

"What is the difference, sir, between the two parties?"

"There is no difference of importance. All Americans are loyal citizens, whichever side they adopt in politics. But the two parties are the positive and negative poles that provide the current of electricity for our nation, and keep it going properly. Also they safeguard our interests by watching one another."

"What is your preference, sir?"

"I've always been a Republican, whenever I dabbled in politics, which hasn't been often."

"Then I will be a Republican."

"Very good."

"I am sorry to say that I know nothing about politics and have no convictions on the subject. Who is to oppose the Honorable Erastus on the—on *our* side?"

"I don't know yet. The primaries for the nomination are not to be held for two weeks, and the Republican candidates seem shy about coming forward."

"Didn't you say the district was Republican?"

"Yes; but since Hopkins defeated them last term they seem to be terrified, and no one likes to offer himself as a possible sacrifice."

"That feeling will probably elect Mr. Hopkins," declared Kenneth, with conviction.

"Unless—"

"Unless what, sir?"

"Unless we come to the rescue of the Republicans and take a hand in local politics ourselves, my lad."

Kenneth pushed back his chair and rose from the table. He walked to the window and stood there whistling for a few moments, and then left the room without a word.

For a time Mr. Watson sat silently musing.

"Perhaps I'm inviting trouble," he murmured; "but I am sure I am doing right. The boy needs a good shaking up and more knowledge of his fellow-men. If I can get Kenneth interested, this plan of mine will be of great benefit to him."

Then he, too, left the breakfast table, and

wandering into the garden saw Kenneth busy at his easel in a shady corner.

For a day or so the subject was not resumed, and then Mr. Watson casually introduced it.

"A law could be passed in the State Legislature forbidding the display of all advertising signs in public places in this county," he suggested.

The boy looked at him eagerly.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"I am positive," was the answer. "It is merely a question of privilege."

"And you think we might hire Hopkins to pass such a law?"

"No; we couldn't trust him."

"Then what do you propose?"

"I'll think it over, my lad, and let you know."

Then he walked away, leaving Kenneth much pleased with the idea he had advanced. Indeed, he was so much interested in the suggestion that he himself referred to the subject at the first opportunity.

"I don't like to be beaten, sir, once I've undertaken to do a thing," he said. "So if such a law

can be passed I'll do all I can to elect the man who will pass it."

"I thought as much," the old lawyer replied, smiling. "But there's only one man who could go to the legislature with enough influence to win the votes to carry such a unique measure through."

"And who is that, sir?"

"Kenneth Forbes, the owner of Elmhurst, and the largest taxpayer in the county."

"Me, sir?"

"You're the man."

"A State Representative?"

"It's an honorable office. It's an important office, properly filled. You might not only beautify your district by having those objectionable signs prohibited, but do many other things to better the condition of the farmers. And that isn't all."

"What's the rest, Mr. Watson?"

"You owe something to yourself, lad. All your young life you've been too self-contained and exclusive in your habits. 'The noblest study of mankind is man.' It would broaden

you to go into politics for a time, and do much to develop your character and relieve the monotony of your existence."

Kenneth frowned.

"It won't be easy, you know. It'll be a fight, and a hard one, for Hopkins won't give up his job if he can help it."

The boy brightened again.

"I like a good fight," he said, wistfully. "If I thought—if I believed I could fill the position with credit—I might undertake it."

"I'll answer for that," retorted the old man, highly pleased with his easy victory. "You win the fight, Ken, and I'll guarantee you'll outclass the majority of your fellow Representatives. It's a good state, too."

So the thing was undertaken, and both the young man and the old threw themselves into the contest with energy and determination.

Mr. Watson rode in his buggy all over their district during the next fortnight, and interviewed the farmers and townsmen of the legislative district. When it became noised about that the young owner of Elmhurst, now barely

twenty-one, had determined to enter politics, and asked for the nomination of Representative, no other Republican ventured to oppose him.

It was understood to mean a hard fight, and even the most sturdy Republican was inclined to fear that the present incumbent of the office would be elected to succeed himself.

So the primaries were held and Kenneth attended and made a speech, and was warmly applauded. His nomination was a matter of course, and he went home the unanimous choice of his party, because none of the older and more discreet politicians ventured to risk defeat.

The Hon. Erastus Hopkins well knew this feeling, and smiled in his pompous and most sardonic manner when he learned who was his opponent. Having conquered an old and tried Republican warrior in the last campaign, he had no fears in regard to this mere boy, who could know little of political intrigue.

"He won't put up enough of a fight to make it interesting, I'm afraid," Mr. Hopkins confided to his cronies.

But he didn't intend to take chances, so he

began the campaign with his usual vigor.

It was now the middle of September, and the election was to be early in November.

CHAPTER V

PLANNING THE WORK

The Honorable Erastus Hopkins was thoroughly enjoying his campaign.

He was not an especially popular man in his district, and he knew it. Physically he was big and stout, with a florid face and small eyes that blinked continually. His head was bald, his hands fat and red and his feet enormous.

To offset this Mr. Hopkins wore a silk hat and a "Prince Albert" coat morning, noon and night. His gold watch-chain was huge and imposing; he had a big diamond shirt-stud, and upon his puffy fingers several rings. He conveyed, nevertheless, the impression that he was more prosperous than refined, and the farmers and townsmen were as quick to recognize this as was Mr. Watson himself.

Moreover, the Honorable Erastus was dubbed

"close-fisted" by his neighbors. He never spent a penny on anyone but himself, and being unscrupulous in politics he was naturally unscrupulous in smaller things of a business nature. But since he had risen from a stable-boy to his present affluent position he had never been unwise or careless enough to be caught in any crooked action; and while his acquaintances had an indefinite fear of dealing with him they could not accuse him openly.

It seems strange that such a man should have been chosen to represent a wealthy and important district in the State Legislature, but politics can show many a similar case. In the first place, Mr. Hopkins was aggressive, and knew political methods thoroughly. He had usurped the position of Democratic leader in his community and the others were afraid to antagonize him openly. When he was nominated for Representative he managed to dictate, by shrewd methods, the nomination of Thompson, the store-keeper, on the Republican ticket. Thompson owed Hopkins a large sum of money and Hopkins held a mortgage on the stock. There-

fore Thompson dared not make a fight, and although the Republican vote was normally the largest in the district, Hopkins had managed to win enough of them to his side to win.

He had been a little anxious about his renomination, because he knew that he had not represented his district very satisfactorily; but when Kenneth Forbes received the nomination on the Republican ticket he felt that "all was over but the shouting" and that he would "win in a walk." Had it been an issue between the personality of the two men, Hopkins would have had little chance of success; but young Forbes had already raised another issue by his anti-sign speech at the school-house, and Hopkins intended to force that issue and so defeat Kenneth because of the ridicule the latter's position had already brought upon him.

He began to circulate humorous stories about Kenneth's antipathy to sign-boards, saying that the young man demanded that the signs be taken off the Zodiac, and that he wouldn't buy goods of the village grocer because the man had a sign out.

Mr. Hopkins also printed thousands of large hand-bills reading "The Signs of the Times vs. Aristocratic Snobbery. Vote for the Hon. Erastus Hopkins, the man who believes in advertising."

These things had their effect upon all classes of people. There were many good-natured laughs at young Forbes's expense. All this was soon realized at Elmhurst, and had the effect of plunging the youthful aspirant for political honors into the depths of despair. The campaign was hot against him, but Kenneth made no defense.

At this juncture, with election but three weeks away, he received a telegram asking him to send the drag and baggage wagon to the noon train. It was signed by John Merrick, and the boy was overjoyed at the prospect of seeing his jolly old friend again. And the girls? Well, some of them surely must be coming, or Uncle John wouldn't have asked for the drag.

"Now then, the election can go to blazes," said Kenneth, cheerfully, to Mr. Watson. "The

sight of some friendly faces will be a great relief."

The old lawyer sighed. His attempt to "wake up" Kenneth had resulted in failure, mainly because the boy had become discouraged so early in the game. Kenneth felt keenly the humiliating experiences he had passed through, and had sunk back into his old moody reserve.

But here was a welcome diversion. The visitors, whoever they might prove to be, would afford relief to the situation and brighten the dulness of life at the big house. So both Kenneth and Mr. Watson were with the drag at the station when the noon train drew in.

And there were Patsy Doyle, Beth DeGraf, and Louise Merrick, a bevy of dainty and sprightly girls, alighting eagerly from the coaches, with Uncle John handing out the grips and packages and giving the checks for the baggage, with business-like celerity, to Thomas the groom.

"We've come for a visit, Ken!" cried Patsy, laughing at his eager delight. "Are you glad

to see us, boy? And do you suppose old Martha has our rooms aired?"

"And it's a long visit, too," added Uncle John, "as you'll believe when you see the pile of baggage. You'd think these minxes were prepared for a tour of the world. Each one of 'em brought a carload of clothes."

But they couldn't phase Kenneth in that way. His sensitive face had not beamed with so much animation for months.

The guests were helped into the tall drag and merrily they drove the five miles to Elmhurst, not a word of politics being spoken on the way.

The girls had not been to the house since Aunt Jane's death, two years ago, and after a hasty luncheon they began an inspection of every room, as well as the garden, grounds and stables. The horses, cows, pigs and chickens were alike inspected, the roses and dahlias visited and admired, and after all this they returned to their rooms with old Martha, the housekeeper, and proceeded to unpack their trunks and get settled. Kenneth had been their guide and companion in these various explorations, but

when the girls went to their rooms he wandered into the library where Uncle John and Mr. Watson had been having a quiet talk over their pipes of tobacco. They welcomed the young man, but adroitly turned the topic of conversation, and again the subject of politics was ignored.

It was a merry dinner party that graced the stately dining-room that evening, and the boy forgot his troubles and was as jolly and sociable as he had ever been in his life.

But when they were all assembled in the long drawing room, where they grouped themselves around the fireplace, a sudden change took place in the demeanor of the young ladies. Patsy, the delegated leader, looked gravely at the boy and asked:

"How goes the campaign, Ken?"

"Wh—what campaign?" he stammered, to gain time.

"Why, this election business. Tell us about it," said Patsy.

"Some other time, girls," answered the boy, red and distressed. "It—it wouldn't interest you a bit."

"Why not?" asked Louise, softly.

"Because it doesn't interest me," he replied.

"Are you so sure of election?" inquired Beth.

"I'm sure of defeat, if you must know," he declared, scowling at the recollection of his predicament.

"You haven't been cowardly enough to give up?" asked Patricia, boldly.

"What do you mean by that, Patsy Doyle?" he asked, the scowl deepening.

"Just what I say, Ken. A brave man doesn't know when he's beaten, much less beforehand."

He looked at her fixedly.

"I'm not brave, my dear," he replied, more gently than they had expected. "The people here don't understand me, nor I them. I'm laughed at and reviled, a subject for contemptuous jeers, and—and it hurts me. I don't like to be beaten. I'd fight to the last gasp, if I had any show to win. But these conditions, which I foolishly but honestly brought about myself, have defeated me so far in advance that I have absolutely no hope to redeem myself. That's all. Don't speak of

it again, girls. Play me that nocturne that I like, Beth."

"We've got to speak of this, Kenneth, and speak of it often. For we girls have come down here to electioneer, and for no other reason on earth," declared Patsy.

"*What! You* electioneer?"—a slight smile curled his lips.

"Exactly. We're here to brace up and get to work."

"And to win," added Beth, quietly.

"And to put you in the Legislature where you belong," declared Louise.

Kenneth turned to Mr. Merrick.

"Talk to them, Uncle John," he begged.

"I have," said the little man, smiling, "and they've convinced me that they mean business. It's all up with you, my boy, as a private citizen. You're as good as elected."

Ken's eyes filled.

"You're all very kind, sir," he said, "as you were bound to be. And—and I appreciate it all—very much. But Mr. Watson will tell you

that the case is hopeless, and there's nothing to be done."

"How about it, Watson?" inquired Uncle John, turning to the lawyer.

"I'll explain the proposition, sir, so you will all understand it," he replied, and drew his chair into the circle. "To begin with, Kenneth visited the glen one day, to make a sketch, and found his old table-rock covered with an advertising sign."

"How preposterous!" exclaimed Louise.

"There were three of these huge signs in different parts of the glen, and they ruined its natural beauty. Kenneth managed to buy up the spaces and then he scrubbed away the signs. By that time he had come to detest the unsightly advertisements that confronted him every time he rode out, and he began a war of extermination against them."

"Quite right," said Patsy, nodding energetically.

"But our friend made little headway because the sympathies of the people were not with him."

"Why not, sir?" inquired Beth, while Kenneth

sat inwardly groaning at this baring of his terrible experiences.

"Because through custom they had come to tolerate such things, and could see no harm in them," replied the lawyer. "They permit their buildings which face the roads to be covered with big advertisements, and the fences are decorated in the same way. In some places a sign-board has been built in their yards or fields, advertising medicines or groceries or tobacco. In other words, our country roads and country homes have become mere advertising mediums to proclaim the goods of more or less unscrupulous manufacturers, and so all their attractiveness is destroyed. Kenneth, being a man of artistic instincts and loving country scenes, resented this invasion of commercialism and tried to fight it."

"And so ran my head against a stone wall," added the young man, with a bitter laugh.

"But you were quite right," said Patsy, decidedly. "Such things ought not to be permitted."

"The people think differently," he replied.

"Then we must educate the people to a different way of thinking," announced Louise.

"In three weeks?"

"That is long enough, if we get to work. Isn't it, girls?" said Beth.

"Kenneth accepted the nomination with the idea of having a law passed prohibiting such signs," explained the lawyer. "But Mr. Hopkins, his opponent, has used this very thing to arouse public sentiment against him. Farmers around here are thrifty people, and they fear to lose the trifling sums paid them for the privilege of painting signs on their premises."

Patsy nodded gravely.

"We will change all that," she said. "The thing is really more serious than we expected, and more difficult. But we came here to work and win, and we're going to do it. Aren't we, Uncle John?"

"I'll bet on your trio, Patsy," replied her uncle. "But I won't bet all I'm worth."

"It's all foolishness," declared Kenneth.

"I do not think so," said the lawyer, gravely. "The girls have a fine show to win. I know

our country people, and they are more intelligent than you suppose. Once they are brought to a proper way of thinking they will support Kenneth loyally."

"Then we must bring them to a proper way of thinking," said Patsy, with decision. "From this time on, Ken, we become your campaign managers. Don't worry any more about the matter. Go on with your painting and be happy. We may require you to make a few speeches, but all the details will be arranged for you."

"Do you intend to permit this, Uncle John?" asked Kenneth.

"I'm wholly in sympathy with the girls, Ken, and I believe in them."

"But consider the humiliation to which they will subject themselves! I've had a taste of that medicine, myself."

"We're going to be the most popular young ladies in this district!" exclaimed Patsy. "Don't you worry about us, Ken. But tell me, how big is your district?"

"It includes parts of three counties—Monroe, Washington and Jackson Counties."

"What county is this?"

"Monroe."

"Any cities?"

"No; only a few towns. It's mostly a rural district. Fairview, just across the border in Washington County, is the biggest village."

"Have you an automobile?"

"No; I don't like the things. I've always loved horses and prefer them to machines."

"How much money are you prepared to spend?"

"How much—what's that?" he asked, bewildered.

"You can't win a political election without spending money," declared Patsy, wisely. "I'll bet the bad man is scattering money in every direction. It will cost something on our side to run this campaign in a way to win."

The young man frowned.

"I don't mind spending money, Patsy," he said, "but I don't approve of buying votes, and I won't allow it, either!"

"Tut-tut! Who said anything about buying votes? But we're going to work on a broad

and liberal basis, I assure you, and we need money."

"Spend all you like, then, so long as you don't try to corrupt the voters."

"Very good. Now, then, how much land do you own at Elmhurst?"

Kenneth looked inquiringly at the lawyer.

"About twelve hundred acres," said Mr. Watson. "It is divided into small farms which are let out on shares."

"How many votes can you control among your servants and tenants?" proceeded Patsy, in a businesslike tone.

"Perhaps thirty or forty."

"And what is the total vote of the district?"

"Thirty-five hundred."

Patsy gasped.

"So many?"

"Fully that many," said Mr. Watson, smiling.

"Then we've got to have over seventeen hundred and fifty votes to elect Kenneth?"

"Exactly."

The girl drew a long breath and looked at Beth and Louise. Then they all laughed.

"Suppose you resign as campaign managers," said Kenneth, beginning to be amused.

"Oh, no! It's—it's easier than we expected. Isn't it, girls?"

"It's child's play," observed Louise, languidly.

The boy was astonished.

"Very well," said he. "Try it and see."

"Of course," said Patsy, cheerfully. "To-morrow morning we begin work."

CHAPTER VI

A GOOD START

At an early breakfast next morning Patsy announced the program for the day.

"Uncle John and I will drive over to the village," she said, "and perhaps we'll be gone all day. Don't worry if we're not back for luncheon. Louise and Mr. Watson are going in the phaeton to visit some of the near-by farmers. Take one road, dear, and follow it straight along, as far as it keeps within our legislative district, and visit every farmhouse on the way."

"The farmers will all be busy in the fields," said Kenneth.

"Louise doesn't care about the farmers," retorted Patsy. "She's going to talk to their wives."

"Wives don't vote, Patsy."

"They tell their husbands how to vote, though," declared Louise, with a laugh. "Let me win the women and I'll win the men."

"What am I to do?" asked Beth.

"You're to stay at home and write several articles for the newspapers. There are seven important papers in our district, and five of them are Republican. Make a strong argument, Beth. You're our publicity department. Also get up copy for some hand-bills and circular letters. I want to get a circular letter to every voter in the district."

"All right," said Beth. "I know what you want."

There was an inspiring air of business about these preparations, and the girls were all eager to begin work. Scarcely was breakfast finished when the two equipages were at the door. Louise and Mr. Watson at once entered the phaeton and drove away, the girl delighted at the prospect of visiting the farmers' wives and winning them by her plausible speeches. Conversation was Louise's strong point. She loved to talk and argue, and her manner was so confiding and

gracious that she seldom failed to interest her listeners.

Patsy and Uncle John drove away in Kenneth's buggy to the town, and during the five-mile drive Patsy counseled gravely with her shrewd uncle in regard to "ways and means."

"This thing requires prompt action, Patsy," he said, "and if we're going to do things that count they've got to be done on a big scale."

"True," she admitted. "But oughtn't we to be a little careful about spending Kenneth's money?"

"I'll be your temporary banker," said the old gentleman, "and keep track of the accounts. If we win we'll present Kenneth our bill, and if we fail I'll have the satisfaction of getting rid of some of that dreadful income that is swamping me."

This was always Uncle John's cry. His enormous fortune was a constant bugbear to him. He had been so interested in his business enterprises for many years that he had failed to realize how his fortune was growing, and it astounded him to wake up one day and find

himself possessed of many millions. He had at once retired from active business and invested his millions in ways that would cause him the least annoyance; but the income on so large a sum was more than he could take care of, and even Major Doyle, who managed these affairs for his brother-in-law, was often puzzled to know what to do with the money that accumulated.

Doubtless no one will ever know how much good these two kindly men accomplished between them in their quiet, secretive way. Dozens of deserving young men were furnished capital to start them in business; dozens more were being educated at universities at Uncle John's expense. Managers of worthy charities were familiar with John Merrick's signature on checks, and yet the vast fortune grew with leaps and bounds. Mr. Merrick's life was so simple and unostentatious that his personal expenses, however erratic some of his actions, could not make much headway against his interest account, and nothing delighted him more than to find a way to "get even

with fate by reckless squandering," as he quaintly expressed it. He was far too shrewd to become the prey of designing people, but welcomed any legitimate channel in which to unload his surplus.

So Mr. Merrick had been revolving the possibilities of this unique political campaign in his mind, and had decided to do some things that would open the bucolic eyes of Kenneth's constituents in wonder. He did not confide all his schemes to Patsy, but having urged his nieces to attempt this conquest he had no intention of allowing them to suffer defeat if he could help it.

The little town of Elmwood was quiet and practically deserted when they drove into it. The farmers were too busy with the harvest to "come to town for trading" except on Saturdays, and the arrival and departure of the two daily trains did not cause more than a ripple of excitement in the village.

Patsy decided she would shop at each and every store in the place, and engage the store-keepers in conversation about the election.

"It's important to win these people," she de-

clared, "because they are close to every farmer who comes to town to trade; and their own votes count, too."

"I'll run over to the bank," said Uncle John, "and get acquainted there."

So he tied the horses to a post and let Patsy proceed alone upon her mission, while he wandered over to a little brick building of neat appearance which bore the inscription "Bank" in gold letters on its plate-glass window.

"Mr. Warren in?" he asked the clerk at the window.

The banker, a dignified old gentleman of considerable ability, came out of his private office and greeted his visitor very cordially. He had known Uncle John when the millionaire visited Elmhurst two years before, and since then had learned more particulars concerning him. So there was no need of an introduction, and Mr. Warren was delighted at the prospect of business relations with this famous personage.

The bank, although small and only one story high, was the most modern and imposing building in the village; and it was fitted with modern con-

veniences, for Mr. Warren had been successful and prosperous. In his private office were local and long distance telephones, a direct connection with the telegraph operator at the station, and other facilities for accomplishing business promptly. Uncle John had remembered this fact, and it had a prominent place in his plans.

He followed the banker into his private office and told him briefly his intention to forward the interests of his young friend Kenneth Forbes for Member of the Legislature.

The old gentleman shook his head, at first, predicting failure. Young Forbes was his most important customer, and he respected him highly; but this anti-sign issue bade fair to ruin all his chances.

"The idea is too progressive and advanced to be considered at this time," he stated, positively. "The encroachments of advertisers on personal property may lead to a revolt in the future, but it is still too early to direct popular opinion against them."

"Isn't Forbes a better man for the place than Hopkins?" asked Uncle John.

"Undoubtedly, sir. And I think Forbes would have won, had not Hopkins forced this unfortunate issue upon him. As it is, our young friend cannot avoid the consequences of his quixotic action."

"He doesn't wish to avoid them," was the quiet reply. "We're going to win on that issue or not at all."

"I'm afraid it's hopeless, sir."

"May I count on your assistance?"

"In every way."

"Thank you, Mr. Warren. I'm going to spend a lot of money. Put this draft for fifty thousand to my credit as a starter."

"Ah, I begin to understand. But—"

"You don't understand at all, yet. May I use your long distance telephone?"

"Of course, sir."

Uncle John had secured considerable information from Mr. Watson, and this enabled him to act comprehensively. The advertising sign business in this part of the state was controlled by two firms, who contracted directly with the advertisers and then had the signs painted upon

spaces secured from the farmers by their wide-awake agents. These signs were contracted for by the year, but the firms controlling the spaces always inserted protective clauses that provided for the removal of any sign when certain conditions required such removal. In such cases a rebate was allowed to the advertiser. This protective clause was absolutely necessary in case of fire, alteration or removal of buildings or destruction of fences and sign-boards by weather or the requirements of the owners. It was this saving clause in the contracts of which Uncle John had decided to take advantage. The contracting sign painters were merely in the business to make money.

Mr. Merrick got the head of the concern in Cleveland over the telephone within half an hour. He talked with the man at length, and talked with the convincing effect that the mention of money has. When he hung up the receiver Uncle John was smiling. Then he called for the Chicago firm. With this second advertising company he met with more difficulties, and Mr. Warren had to come to the telephone and assure

the man that Mr. Merrick was able to pay all he agreed to, and that the money was on deposit in his bank. That enabled Mr. Merrick to conclude his arrangements. He knew that he was being robbed, but the co-operation of the big Chicago firm was necessary to his plans.

Then, the telephone having served its purpose, Mr. Warren took Uncle John across the street to the newspaper office and introduced him to Charley Briggs, the editor.

Briggs was a man with one eye, a sallow complexion and sandy hair that stuck straight up from his head. He set type for his paper, besides editing it, and Uncle John found him wearing a much soiled apron, with his bare arms and fingers smeared with printer's ink.

"Mr. Merrick wants to see you on business, Charley," said the banker. "Whatever he agrees to I will guarantee, to the full resources of my bank."

The editor pricked up his ears and dusted a chair for his visitor with his apron. It wasn't easy to make a living running a paper in Elm-

wood, and if there was any business pending he was anxious to secure it.

Uncle John waited until Mr. Warren had left him alone with the newspaper man. Then he said:

"I understand your paper is Democratic, Mr. Briggs."

"That's a mistake, sir," replied the editor, evasively. "The *Herald* is really independent, but in political campaigns we adopt the side we consider the most deserving of support."

"You're supporting Hopkins just now."

"Only mildly; only mildly, sir."

"What is he paying you?"

"Why, 'Rast and I haven't come to a definite settlement yet. I ought to get a hundred dollars out of this campaign, but 'Rast thinks fifty is enough. You see, he plans on my support anyhow, and don't like to spend more than he's obliged to."

"Why does he plan on your support?"

"He's the only live one in the game, Mr. Merrick. 'Rast is one of us—he's one of the people

—and it's policy for me to support him instead of the icicle up at Elmhurst, who don't need the job and don't care whether he gets it or not."

"Is that true?"

"I think so. And there's another thing. Young Forbes is dead against advertising, and advertising is the life of a newspaper. Why, there isn't a paper in the district that's supporting Forbes this year."

"You've a wrong idea of the campaign, Mr. Briggs," said Uncle John. "It is because Mr. Forbes believes in newspaper advertising, and wants to protect it, that he's against these signs. That's one reason, anyhow. Can't you understand that every dollar spent for painting signs takes that much away from your newspapers?"

"Why, perhaps there's something in that, Mr. Merrick. I'd never looked at it that way before."

"Now, see here, Mr. Briggs. I'll make you a proposition. I'll give you two hundred and fifty to support Mr. Forbes in this campaign, and if he's elected I'll give you five hundred extra."

"Do you mean that, sir?" asked the editor, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his ears.

"I do. Draw up a contract and I'll sign it. And here's a check for your two-fifty in advance."

The editor drew up the agreement with a pen that trembled a little.

"And now," said Uncle John, "get busy and hustle for Kenneth Forbes."

"I will, sir," said Briggs, with unexpected energy. "I mean to win that extra five hundred!"

CHAPTER VII

PATSY MAKES PROGRESS

Meantime Patsy was in the thick of the fray. The druggist was a deep-dyed Democrat, and sniffed when she asked him what he thought of Forbes for Representative.

"He's no politician at all—just an aristocrat," declared Latham, a dapper little man with his hair slicked down to his ears and a waxed moustache. "And he's got fool notions, too. If he stopped the advertising signs I wouldn't sell half as many pain-killers and liver-pills."

"He's my cousin," said Patsy, mendaciously; for although they called themselves cousins there was no relationship even of marriage, as Patsy's Aunt Jane had merely been betrothed to Kenneth's uncle when he died.

"I'm sorry for that, miss," replied the druggist. "He's going to be badly beaten."

"I think I'll take two ounces of this perfumery.

It is really delightful. Some druggists have so little taste in selecting such things."

"Yes, miss, I do rather pride myself on my perfumes," replied Latham, graciously. "Now here's a sachet powder that gives fine satisfaction."

"I'll take a couple of packets of that, too, since you recommend it."

Latham began doing up the purchases. There was no other customer in the store.

"You know, miss, I haven't anything against Mr. Forbes myself. His people are good customers. It's his ideas I object to, and he's a Republican."

"Haven't you ever voted for a Republican?" asked the girl. "Don't you think it better to vote for the best man, rather than the best party, in a case like this?"

"Why, perhaps it is. But in what way is Mr. Forbes the best man?"

"He's honest. He doesn't want to make any money out of the office. On the contrary, he's willing and able to spend a good deal in passing laws that will benefit his district."

"And Hopkins?"

"Don't you know Mr. Hopkins?" she asked, pointedly.

"Yes, miss; I do." And Latham frowned a little.

"As regards the advertising signs," continued the girl, "I've heard you spoken of as a man of excellent taste, and I can believe it since I've examined the class of goods you keep. And your store is as neat and attractive as can be. The fight is not against the signs themselves, but against putting them on fences and barns, and so making great glaring spots in a landscape where all should be beautiful and harmonious. I suppose a man of your refinement and good taste has often thought of that, and said the same thing."

"Why—ahem!—yes; of course, miss. I agree with you that the signs are often out of place, and—and inharmonious."

"To be sure; and so you must sympathize with Mr. Forbes's campaign."

"In that way, yes; of course," said Mr.

Latham, puzzled to find himself changing front so suddenly.

"Mr. Hopkins has taken a lot of money out of this town," remarked Patsy, examining a new kind of tooth wash. "But I can't find that he's ever given much of it back."

"That's true. He buys his cigars of Thompson, the general store man, and I keep the finest line ever brought to this town."

"Oh, that reminds me!" exclaimed Patsy. "Mr. Forbes wanted me to purchase a box of your choicest brand, and have you just hand them out to your customers with his compliments. He thinks he ought to show a little cordiality to the men who vote for him, and he said you would know just the people to give them to."

Latham gasped, but he assumed an air of much importance.

"I know every man that comes to this town, miss, as well as any you'll find," he said.

"The best brand, mind you, Mr. Latham," said the girl. "How much will they be?"

"Why, the very best—these imported perfectos,

you know—are worth six dollars a box of fifty. Perhaps for election purposes something a little cheaper—"

"Oh, no; the best is none too good for the friends of Mr. Forbes, you know. And fifty—why fifty will scarcely go around. I'll pay for a hundred, Mr. Latham, and you'll see they go to the right persons."

"Of course; of course, miss. And much obliged. You see, young Forbes is well liked, and he's quite a decent fellow. I wouldn't be surprised if he gave Hopkins a hard fight."

"I'll tell you a secret," said Patsy, sweetly. "Mr. Forbes is bound to be elected. Why, it's all arranged in advance, Mr. Latham, and the better element, like yourself, is sure to support him. By the way, you won't forget to tell people about those signs, I hope? That the fight is not against advertising, but for beautiful rural homes and scenes."

"Oh, I'll fix that, Miss—"

"Doyle. I'm Miss Doyle, Mr. Forbes's cousin."

"I'll see that the people understand this campaign, Miss Doyle. You can depend on me."

"And if the cigars give out, don't hesitate to open more boxes. I'll call in, now and then, and settle for them."

I really think this young lady might have been ashamed of herself; but she wasn't. She smiled sweetly upon the druggist when he bowed her out, and Mr. Latham from that moment began to seek for friends of Mr. Forbes to give cigars to. If they were not friends, he argued with them until they were; for he was an honest little man, in his way, and tried to act in good faith.

So the girl went from one shop to another, making liberal purchases and seeking for every opening that would enable her to make a convert. And her shrewd Irish wit made her quick to take advantage of any weakness she discovered in the characters of the people she interviewed.

When noon came Uncle John hunted her up, which was not difficult, in Elmwood, and together they went to the village "hotel" to get something to eat. The mid-day dinner was not very inviting, but Patsy praised the cooking to the landlord's wife, who waited upon the table, and Uncle John bought one of the landlord's cigars after

the meal and talked politics with him while he smoked it.

Then Patsy went over to the general store, and there she met her first rebuff. Thompson, the proprietor, was a sour-visaged man, tall and lanky and evidently a dyspeptic. Having been beaten by Hopkins at the last election, when he ran against him on the Republican ticket, Thompson had no desire to see Forbes more successful than he had been himself. And there were other reasons that made it necessary for him to support Hopkins.

So he was both gruff and disagreeable when Patsy, after buying a lot of ribbons of him, broached the subject of politics. He told her plainly that her cousin hadn't a "ghost of a show," and that he was glad of it.

"The young fool had no business to monkey with politics," he added, "and this will teach him to keep his fingers out of someone else's pie."

"It isn't Mr. Hopkins's pie," declared Patsy, stoutly. "It belongs to whoever gets the votes."

"Well, that's Hopkins. He knows the game, and Forbes don't."

"Can't he learn?" asked the girl.

"No. He's an idiot. Always was a crank and an unsociable cuss when a boy, and he's worse now he's grown up. Oh, I know Forbes, all right; and I haven't got no use for him, neither."

Argument was useless in this case. The girl sighed, gathered up her purchases, and went into the hardware store.

Immediately her spirits rose. Here was a man who knew Kenneth, believed in him and was going to vote for him. She had a nice talk with the hardware man, and he gave her much useful information about the most important people in the neighborhood—those it would be desirable to win for their candidate. When he mentioned Thompson, she said:

"Oh, he's impossible. I've talked with him."

"Thompson is really a good Republican," replied Mr. Andrews, the hardware man. "But he's under Hopkins's thumb and doesn't dare defy him."

"Doesn't he like Mr. Hopkins?" asked Patsy, in surprise.

"No; he really hates him. You see, Thompson

isn't a very successful merchant. He has needed money at times, and borrowed it of Hopkins at a high rate of interest. It's a pretty big sum now, and Hopkins holds a mortgage on the stock. If he ever forecloses, as he will do some day, Thompson will be ruined. So he's obliged to shout for Hopkins, whether he believes in him or not."

"I think I understand him now," said Patsy, smiling. "But he needn't have been so disagreeable."

"He's a disagreeable man at any time," returned Mr. Andrews.

"Has he any political influence?" asked the girl.

"Yes, considerable. Otherwise he couldn't have secured the nomination when he pretended to run against Hopkins—for it was only a pretense. You see, he's a well known Republican, and when he sides for Hopkins he's bound to carry many Republicans with him."

But there were other important people whom Mr. Andrews thought might be influenced, and

he gave Patsy a list of their names. He seemed much amused at the earnestness of this girlish champion of the Republican candidate.

"I do not think we can win," he said, as she left him; "but we ought to make a good showing for your cousin, and I'll do my very best to help you."

As she rode home with Uncle John in the afternoon, after a day of really hard work, Patsy sized up the situation and declared that she was satisfied that she had made progress. She told Mr. Merrick of the mortgage held over Thompson by Mr. Hopkins, and the little man made a mental note of the fact. He also was satisfied with his day's work, and agreed to ride over to Fairview the next day with her and carry the war into this, the largest village in Kenneth's district.

Meantime Louise and Mr. Watson were having some interesting interviews with the farmers' wives along the Marville road. The old lawyer knew nearly everyone in this part of the country, for he had lived here all his life. But he let Louise do the talking and was much pleased at

the tact and good nature she displayed in dealing with the widely different types of character she encountered.

Her method was quite simple, and for that reason doubly effective. She sat down in Mrs. Simmons's kitchen, where the good woman was ironing, and said:

"I'm a cousin of Mr. Forbes, up at Elmhurst, you know. He's running for a political office, so as to do some good for his county and district, and I've come to see if you'll help me get votes for him."

"Law sakes, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Simmons, "I ain't got nuthin' to do with politics."

"No; but you've got a lot to do with Mr. Simmons, and that's where we need your help. You see, Mr. Forbes thinks Mr. Simmons is one of the most important men in this district, and he's very anxious to win his vote."

"Why don't you see Dan, then? He's out'n the rye field," replied the woman.

"It's because I'm only a girl, and he wouldn't listen to me," replied Louise, sweetly. "But he takes your advice about everything, I hear—"

"He don't take it as often as he orter, don't Dan," interrupted Mrs. Simmons, pausing to feel whether her iron was hot.

"Perhaps not," agreed Louise; "but in important things, such as this, he's sure to listen to you; and we women must stick together if we want to win this election."

"But I don't know nothin' about it," protested Mrs. Simmons; "an' I don't believe Dan does."

"You don't need to know much, Mrs. Simmons," replied the girl. "What a pretty baby that is! All you need do is to tell Dan he must vote for Mr. Forbes, and see that he agrees to do so."

"Why?" was the pointed query.

"Well, there are several reasons. One is that Mr. Hopkins—Mr. Erastus Hopkins, you know, is the other candidate, and a person must vote for either one or the other of them."

"Dan's a friend o' 'Rastus," said the woman, thoughtfully. "I seen 'em talkin' together the other day."

"But this isn't a matter of friendship; it's business, and Mr. Forbes is very anxious to have your

husband with him. If Mr. Forbes is elected it means lighter taxes, better roads and good schools. If Mr. Hopkins is elected it does not mean anything good except for Mr. Hopkins."

"I guess you're right about that," laughed the woman. "'Rast don't let much get away from him."

"You're very clever, Mrs. Simmons. You have discovered the fact without being told."

"Oh, I know 'Rast Hopkins, an' so does Dan."

"Then I can depend on you to help us?" asked the girl, patting the tousled head of a little girl who stood by staring at "the pretty lady."

"I'll talk to him, but I dunno what good it'll do," said Mrs. Simmons, thoughtfully.

"I know. He won't refuse to do what you ask him, for a man always listens to his wife when he knows she's right. You'll win, Mrs. Simmons, and I want to thank you for saving the election for us. If we get Mr. Simmons on our side I believe we'll be sure to defeat Hopkins."

"Oh, I'll do what I kin," was the ready promise, and after a few more remarks about the

children and the neatness of the house, Louise took her leave.

"Will she win him over?" asked the girl of Mr. Watson, when they were jogging on to the next homestead.

"I really can't say, my dear," replied the old lawyer, thoughtfully; "but I imagine she'll try to, and if Dan doesn't give in Mrs. Simmons will probably make his life miserable for a time. You flattered them both outrageously; but that will do no harm."

And so it went on throughout the day. Sometimes the farmer himself was around the house, and then they held a sort of conference; Louise asked his advice about the best way to win votes, and said she depended a great deal upon his judgment. She never asked a man which side he favored, but took it for granted that he was anxious to support Mr. Forbes; and this subtle flattery was so acceptable that not one declared outright that he was for Hopkins, whatever his private views might have been.

When evening came and they had arrived at

Elmhurst again, Louise was enthusiastic over her work of the day, and had many amusing tales to tell of her experiences.

"How many votes did you win?" asked Uncle John, smiling at her.

"I can't say," she replied; "but I didn't lose any. If one sows plenty of seed, some of it is bound to sprout."

"We can tell better after election," said Mr. Watson. "But I'm satisfied that this is the right sort of work, Mr. Merrick, to get results."

"So am I," returned Uncle John heartily. "Are you willing to keep it up, Louise?"

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "We start again bright and early tomorrow morning."

CHAPTER VIII

THE HONORABLE ERASTUS IS ASTONISHED

The Honorable Erastus Hopkins had been absent at the state capital for several days, looking after various matters of business; for he was a thrifty man, and watched his investments carefully.

Whenever his acquaintances asked about his chances for re-election, the Honorable Erastus Hopkins winked, laughed and declared, "it's a regular walk-over."

"Who is opposing you?" once asked a gray-haired Senator of much political experience, who had met Mr. Hopkins at luncheon.

"Young feller named Forbes—a boy, sir—with no notion about the game at all. He was pledged to an unpopular issue, so I was mighty glad to have him run against me."

"What issue is he pledged to?" asked the Senator.

"Oh, he's agin putting advertising signs on fences and barns, and wants to have them prohibited, like the infernal fool he is."

"Indeed. Then he's a progressive fellow. And you say his issue is unpopular?"

"That's what it is. It'll kill his chances—if he ever had any."

"Strange," mused the Senator. "That issue has been a winning one usually."

"What do you mean?" asked the astonished Hopkins.

"Why, the anti-sign fight has won in several places throughout the country, and local laws have been passed prohibiting them. Didn't you know that?"

"No!" said Hopkins.

"Well, it's true. Of course I do not know the temper of your people, but in a country district such as yours I would think an issue of that sort very hard to combat."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Honorable Erastus. "Ev'ry man Jack's agin the fool notion."

"Then perhaps the people don't understand it."

"Forbes has given up already," continued Hopkins, laughing at the recollection. "He's gone back into his shell like a turtle, an' won't come out to fight. I tell you, Senator, he's the worst licked candidate that ever ran for office."

Nevertheless, the suggestion that the anti-sign issue had been successful in other localities made Mr. Hopkins a trifle uneasy, and he decided to return home and keep the fight going until after election, whether young Forbes came out of his shell or not.

He arrived at Hilldale on the early morning train and went to his house for breakfast. To his amazement he found two great banners strung across the village streets bearing the words: *"Vote for Forbes—the People's Champion!"*

"Who in thunder could 'a' done that?" murmured Mr. Hopkins, staring open-mouthed at the great banners. Then he scratched his head with a puzzled air and went home.

Mrs. Hopkins, a tired-looking woman in a bedraggled morning wrapper, was getting the breakfast. She did not participate largely in the pros-

perity of her husband, and often declared she was "worked to death," although there were no children to care for.

"When did those Forbes banners go up?" asked Mr. Hopkins, irritably.

"I dunno, 'Rast. I don't keep track o' such things. But all the town was out to the girls' meetin' last night, an' I went along to watch the fun."

"What girls' meeting?"

"The girls thet air workin' fer to elect Mr. Forbes. It was in the town hall, an' all three of the girls made speeches."

"What about?"

"About Mr. Forbes, and how he orter be elected. He wants to beautify the farm places by doin' away with signs, an' he wants better roads, an' three new school-houses, 'cause the ones we've got now ain't big enough. An—"

"You blamed idiot! What are you talking about?" roared the exasperated Hopkins.

"Oh, you needn't rave at me, 'Rast Hopkins, just 'cause you're gettin' licked. I thought your

goose was cooked the minnit these girls got to work."

Mr. Hopkins stared at her with a dazed expression.

"Be sensible, Mary, and tell me who these girls are. I haven't heard of 'em."

"Why, they're cousins o' Kenneth Forbes, it seems, an' come from New York to git him elected."

"What are they like?"

"They're swell dressers, 'Rast, an' nice appearin' girls, and mighty sharp with their tongues. They had a good meetin' last night and there'll be another at the town hall next week."

"Pah! Girls! Forbes oughter be ashamed of himself, to send a bunch o' girls out electioneerin'. I never heard of such an irregular thing. What do the boys say?"

"Folks don't say much to me, 'Rast. They wouldn't, you know. But I guess your game is up."

He made no reply. Here, indeed, was information of a startling character. And it came

upon him like thunder out of a clear sky. Yet the thing might not be so important as Mrs. Hopkins feared.

Very thoughtfully he unfolded the morning paper, and the next moment uttered a roar of wrath and vexation. Briggs was one of his stand-bys, and the *Herald* heretofore had always supported him; yet here across the first page were big black letters saying: *"Vote for Forbes!"* And the columns were full of articles and paragraphs praising Forbes and declaring that he could and would do more for the district than Hopkins.

"I must see Briggs," muttered the Honorable Erastus. "He's tryin' to make me put up that hundred—an' I guess I'll have to do it."

He looked over the other newspapers which were heaped upon his desk in the sitting-room, and was disgusted to find all but one of the seven papers in the district supporting Forbes. Really, the thing began to look serious. And he had only been absent a week!

He had not much appetite for breakfast when Mrs. Hopkins set it before him. But the Hon-

orable Erastus was a born fighter, and his discovery had only dismayed him for a brief time. Already he was revolving ways of contesting this new activity in the enemy's camp, and decided that he must talk with "the boys" at once.

So he hurried away from the breakfast table and walked down-town. Latham was first on his route and he entered the drug store.

"Hullo, Jim."

"Good morning, Mr. Hopkins. Anything I can do for you?" asked the polite druggist.

"Yes, a lot. Tell me what these fool girls are up to, that are plugging for Forbes. I've been away for a week, you know."

"Can't say, Mr. Hopkins, I'm sure. Business is pretty lively these days, and it keeps me hustling. I've no time for politics."

"But we've got to wake up, Jim, we Democrats, or they'll give us a run for our money."

"Oh, this is a Republican district, sir. We can't hope to win it often, and especially in a case like this."

"Why not?"

"Looks to me as if you'd bungled things, Hop-

kins. But I'm not interested in this campaign. Excuse me; if there's nothing you want, I've got a prescription to fill."

Mr. Hopkins walked out moodily. It was very evident that Latham had changed front. But they had never been very staunch friends; and he could find a way to even scores with the little druggist later.

Thompson was behind his desk at the general store when Hopkins walked in.

"Lock here," said the Honorable Representative, angrily, "what's been going on in Elmwood? What's all this plugging for Forbes mean?"

Thompson gave him a sour look over the top of his desk.

"Addressin' them remarks to me, 'Rast?"

"Yes—to you! You've been loafing on your job, old man, and it won't do—it won't do at all. You should have put a stop to these things. What right have these girls to interfere in a game like this?"

"Oh, shut up, 'Rast."

"Thompson! By crickey, I won't stand this from you. Goin' back on me, eh?"

"I'm a Republican, 'Rast."

"So you are," said Mr. Hopkins, slowly, his temper at white heat. "And that mortgage is two months overdue."

"Go over to the bank and get your money, then. It's waiting for you, Hopkins—interest and all. Go and get it, and let me alone. I'm busy."

Perhaps the politician had never been so surprised in his life. Anger gave way to sudden fear, and he scrutinized the averted countenance of Thompson carefully.

"Where'd you raise the money, Thompson?"

"None of your business. I raised it."

"Forbes, eh? Forbes has bought you up, I see. Grateful fellow, ain't you—when I loaned you money to keep you from bankruptcy!"

"You did, Hopkins. You made me your slave, and threatened me every minute, unless I did all your dirty work. Grateful? You've led me a dog's life. But I'm through with you now—for good and all."

Hopkins turned and walked out without another word. In the dentist's office Dr. Squiers

was sharpening and polishing his instruments.

"Hello, Archie."

"Hello, 'Rast. 'Bout time you was getting back, old man. We're having a big fight on our hands, I can tell you."

"Tell me more," said Mr. Hopkins, taking a chair with a sigh of relief at finding one faithful friend. "What's up, Archie?"

"An invasion of girls, mostly. They took us by surprise, the other day, and started a campaign worthy of old political war-horses. There's some shrewd politician behind them, I know, or they wouldn't have nailed us up in our coffins with such business-like celerity."

"Talk sense, Archie. What have they done? What *can* they do? Pah! Girls!"

"Don't make a mistake, 'Rast. That's what I did, before I understood. When I heard that three girls were electioneering for Forbes I just laughed. Then I made a discovery. They're young and rich, and evidently ladies. They're pretty, too, and the men give in at the first attack. They don't try to roast you. That's their cleverness. They tell what Forbes can do,

with all his money, if he's Representative, and they swear he'll do it."

"Never mind," said Hopkins, easily. "We'll win the men back again."

"But these girls are riding all over the country, talking to farmers' wives, and they're organizing a woman's political club. The club is to meet at Elmhurst and to be fed on the fat of the land; so every woman wants to belong. They've got two expensive automobiles down from the city, with men to make them go, and they're spending money right and left."

"That's bad," said Hopkins, shifting uneasily, "for I haven't much to spend, myself. But most money is fooled away in politics. When I spend a cent it counts, I can tell you."

"You'll have to spend some, 'Rast, to keep your end up. I'm glad you're back, for we Democrats have been getting demoralized. Some of the boys are out for Forbes already."

Hopkins nodded, busy with his thoughts.

"I've talked with Latham. But he didn't count. And they've bought up Thompson. What else they've done I can't tell yet. But one thing's

certain, Doc; we'll win out in a canter. I'm too old a rat to be caught in a trap like this. I've got resources they don't suspect."

"I believe you, 'Rast. They've caught on to the outside fakes to win votes; but they don't know the inside deals yet."

"You're right. But I must make a bluff to offset their daylight campaign, so as not to lose ground with the farmers. They're the ones that count, after all; not the town people. See here, Doc, I had an idea something might happen, and so I arranged with my breakfast food company to let me paint a hundred signs in this neighborhood. A hundred, mind you! and that means a big laugh on Forbes, and the good will of the farmers who sell their spaces, and not a cent out of my pocket. How's that for a checkmate?"

"That's fine," replied Dr. Squiers. "There's been considerable talk about this sign business, and I'm told that at the meeting last night one of the girls made a speech about it, and said the farmers were being converted, and were now standing out for clean fences and barns."

"That's all humbug!"

"I think so, myself. These people are like a flock of sheep. Get them started a certain way and you can't head t em off," observed the dentist.

"Then we must start them our way," declared Hopkins. I've got the order for these signs in my pocket, and I'll have 'em painted all over the district in a week. Keep your eyes open, Doc. If we've got to fight we won't shirk it; but I don't look for much trouble from a parcel of girls."

Mr. Hopkins was quite cheerful by this time, for he had thought out the situation and his "fighting blood was up," as he expressed it.

He walked away whistling softly to himself and decided that he would go over to the livery stable, get a horse and buggy, drive out into the country, and spend the day talking with the farmers.

But when he turned the corner into the side street where the livery was located he was astonished to find a row of horses and wagons lining each side of the street, and in each vehicle two men in white jumpers and overalls. The men

were in charge of huge cans of paints, assorted brushes, ladders, scaffolds and other paraphernalia.

There must have been twenty vehicles, altogether, and some of the rigs were already starting out and driving briskly away in different directions.

Mr. Hopkins was puzzled. He approached one of the white-overalled men who was loading cans of paint into a wagon and inquired:

"Who are you fellows?"

"Sign painters," answered the man, with an amused look.

"Who do you work for?"

"The Carson Advertising Sign Company of Cleveland."

"Oh, I see," replied Hopkins. "Got a big job in this neighborhood?"

"Pretty big, sir."

"Who's your foreman?"

"Smith. He's in the livery office."

Then the man climbed into his wagon and drove away, and Hopkins turned into the livery

office. A thin-faced man with sharp eyes was talking with the proprietor.

"Is this Mr. Smith?" asked Hopkins.

"Yes."

"Of the Carson Advertising Sign Company?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've got a big job for you. My name's Hopkins. I want a hundred big signs painted mighty quick."

"Sorry, sir; we've got all we can handle here for two or three weeks."

"It's got to be done quick or not at all. Can't you send for more men?"

"We've got thirty-eight on this job, and can't get any more for love or money. Had to send to Chicago for some of these."

"Rush job?"

"Yes, sir. You'll have to excuse me. I've got to get started. This is only our second day and we're pretty busy."

"Wait a minute," called the bewildered Hopkins, following Smith to his buggy. "What concern is your firm doing all this painting for?"

"A man named Merrick."

Then the foreman drove away, and Mr. Hopkins was left greatly puzzled.

"Merrick—Merrick!" he repeated. "I don't remember any big advertiser by that name. It must be some new concern. Anyhow, it all helps in my fight against Forbes."

He again returned to the livery office and asked for a rig.

"Everything out, Mr. Hopkins. I've hired everything to be had in town for this sign-painting gang."

But Mr. Hopkins was not to be balked. As long as these sign-painters were doing missionary work for his cause among the farmers, he decided to drive over to Fairview and see the party leaders in that important town. So he went back to Dr. Squiers's house and borrowed the Doctor's horse and buggy.

He drove along the turnpike for a time in silence. Then it struck him that there was a peculiar air of neatness about the places he passed. The barns and fences all seemed newly

painted, and he remembered that he hadn't seen an advertising sign since he left town.

A mile farther on he came upon a gang of the sign painters, who with their huge brushes were rapidly painting the entire length of a weather-worn fence with white paint.

Mr. Hopkins reined in and watched them for a few moments.

"You sign-painters don't seem to be getting any signs started," he observed.

"No," replied one of the men, laughing. "This is a peculiar job for our firm to tackle. We've made a contract to paint out every sign in the district."

"Paint 'em out!"

"Yes, cover them up with new paint, and get rid of them."

"But how about the advertisers? Don't they own the spaces now?"

"They did; but they've all been bought up. John Merrick owns the spaces now, and we're working for John Merrick."

"Who's he?"

"Some friend of Mr. Forbes, up at Elmhurst."

Mr. Hopkins was not a profane man, but he said a naughty word. And then he cut his horse so fiercely with the whip that the poor beast gave a neigh of terror, and started down the road at a gallop.

CHAPTER IX

OL' WILL ROGERS

Beth had her folding table out in the rose garden where Kenneth was working at his easel, and while the boy painted she wrote her campaign letters and "editorials."

At first Ken had resented the management of his campaign by his three girl friends; but soon he was grateful for their assistance and proud of their talents. It was at their own request that he refrained from any active work himself, merely appearing at the meetings they planned, where he made his speeches and impressed his hearers with his earnestness. He was really an excellent speaker, and his youth and enthusiasm counted much in his favor.

He protested mildly when Louise invited the Women's Political Club to meet at Elmhurst on

Thursday afternoon, but Mr. Watson assured him that this was an important play for popularity, so he promised to meet them. Tables were to be spread upon the lawn, for the late October weather was mild and delightful, and Louise planned to feed the women in a way that they would long remember.

Patsy had charge of the towns and Louise of the country districts, but Beth often aided Louise, who had a great deal of territory to cover.

The automobiles Uncle John had ordered sent down were a great assistance to the girls, and enabled them to cover twice as much territory in a day as would have been done with horses.

But, although they worked so tirelessly and earnestly, it was not all plain sailing with the girl campaigners. Yet though they met with many rebuffs, they met very little downright impertinence. Twice Louise was asked to leave a house where she had attempted to make a proselyte, and once a dog was set upon Beth by an irate farmer, who resented her automobile as much as he did her mission. As for Patsy, she was often told in the towns that " a young girl

ought to be in better business than mixing up in politics," and she was sensitive enough once or twice to cry over these reproaches when alone in her chamber. But she maintained a cheerful front; and, in truth, all the girls enjoyed their work immensely.

While Beth and Kenneth were in the garden this sunny afternoon James came to say that a man wanted to see "one of the politics young ladies."

"Shall we send him about his business, Beth?" asked the boy.

"Oh, no; we can't afford to lose a single vote. Bring him here, James, please," said the girl.

So presently a wizened little man in worn and threadbare garments, his hat in his hand, came slowly into the garden. His sunken cheeks were covered with stubby gray whiskers, his shoulders were stooped and bent from hard work, and his hands bore evidences of a life of toil. Yet the eyes he turned upon Beth, as she faced him had a wistful and pleading look that affected her strangely.

"Afternoon, miss," he said, in a hesitating

voice. "I—I'm Rogers, miss; ol' Will Rogers. I—I s'pose you hain't heerd o' me before."

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Rogers," replied the girl in her pleasant voice. "Have you come to see me about the election?"

"It's—it's sump'n 'bout the 'lection, an' then agin it ain't. But I run the chanct o' seein' ye, because we're in desprit straits, an' Nell advised that I hev a talk with ye. 'Frank an' outright,' says Nell. 'Don't beat about the bush,' says she. 'Go right to th' point an' they'll say yes or no.' "

Beth laughed merrily, and the boy smiled as he wielded his brush with delicate strokes.

"Ye mustn't mind me, miss," said Will Rogers, in a deprecating tone. "I'm—I'm sommut broke up an' discouraged, an' ain't th' man I used to be. Nell knows that, an' she orter came herself; but it jes' made her cry to think o' it, an' so I says I'll come an' do the best I kin."

Beth was really interested now.

"Sit down on this bench, Mr. Rogers," she said, "and I'll listen to whatever you have to say."

He sat down willingly, bent forward as he

rested upon the garden bench, and twirled his hat slowly in his hands.

"'Taint easy, ye know, miss, to say some things, an' this is one o' the hardest," he began.

"Go on," said Beth, encouragingly, for old Will had suddenly stopped short and seemed unable to proceed.

"They say, miss, as you folks is a-spendin' uv a lot o' money on this election, a-gittin' votes, an' sich like," he said, in an altered tone.

"It costs a little to run a political campaign," acknowledged Beth.

"They say money's bein' poured out liken water—to git votes," he persisted.

"Well, Mr. Rogers?"

"Well, thet's how it started, ye see. We're so agonizin' poor, Nell thought we orter git some o' the money while it's goin'."

The girl was much amused. Such frankness was both unusual and refreshing.

"Have you a vote to sell?" she asked.

He did not answer at once, but sat slowly twirling his hat.

"That's jes' what Nell thought ye'd ask," he

said, finally, "an' she knew if ye did it was all up with our plan. Guess I'll be goin', miss."

He rose slowly from his seat, but the girl did not intend to lose any of the fun this queer individual might yet furnish.

"Sit down, Mr. Rogers," she said, "and tell me why you can't answer my questions?"

"I guess I'll hev to speak out an' tell all," said he, his voice trembling a little, "although I thought fer a minnit I could see my way without. I can't sell my vote, miss, 'cause I've been plannin' t'vote fer Mr. Forbes anyhow. But we wanted some uv th' money that's being wasted, an' we wanted it mighty bad."

"Why?"

"Thet's the hard part uv it, miss; but I'm goin' to tell you. Did ye ever hear o' Lucy?"

"No, Mr. Rogers."

"Lucy's our girl—the on'y chick er child we ever had. She's a pretty girl, is Lucy; a good deal liken her mother; wi' the same high spirits my Nell had afore she broke down. Mostly Nell cries, nowadays."

"Yes. Go on."

"Lucy had a schoolin', an' we worked hard to give it her, fer my land ain't much account, nohow. An' when she grew up she had more boys comin' to see her than any gal this side o' Fairview, an' one o' 'em caught Lucy's fancy. But she was too young to marry, an' she wanted to be earnin' money; so she got a job workin' fer Doc Squiers, over to Elmwood. He's the dentist there, an' Lucy helped with the housework an' kept the office slicked up, an' earned ev'ry penny she got."

He stopped here, and looked vacantly around.

Beth tried to help the old man.

"And then?" she asked, softly.

"Then come the trouble, miss. One day ol' Mis' Squiers, the Doc's mother, missed a di'mon' ring. She laid it on the mantel an' it was gone, an' she said as Lucy took it. Lucy didn't take it, an' after they'd tried to make my gal confess as she was a thief they give 'er three days to hand up the ring or the money it was worth, or else they'd hev her arrested and sent t' jail. Lucy

didn't take it, ye know. She jes' *couldn't* do sech a thing, natcherly."

"I know," said Beth, sympathetically.

"So she comes home, heartbroken, an' told us about it, an' we didn't hev th' money nuther. It were sixty dollars they wanted, or th' ring; an' we didn't hev neither of 'em."

"Of course not."

"Well, Tom come over thet night to see Lucy, hearin' she was home, an'—"

"Who is Tom?"

"Thet's Tom Gates, him thet—but I'm comin' to thet, miss. Tom always loved Lucy, an' wanted to marry her; but his folks is as poor as we are, so the young 'uns had to wait. Tom worked at the mill over t' Fairview—the big saw-mill where they make the lumber an' things."

"I know."

"He was the book-keeper, fer Tom had schoolin', too; an' he took private lessons in book-keepin' from ol' Cheeseman. So he had got hired at the mill, an' had a likely job, an' was doin' well. An' when Tom heerd about Lucy's trouble, an' thet she had only two days left before

goin' to jail, he up an' says: 'I'll get the money, Lucy: don' you worry a bit.' 'Oh, Tom!' says she, 'hev you got sixty dollars saved already?' 'I've got it, Lucy,' says he, 'an' I'll go over to-morrow an' pay Doc Squiers. Don' you worry any more. Forget all about it.' Well o' course, miss, that helped a lot. Nell an' Lucy both felt the disgrace o' the thing, but it wouldn't be a public disgrace, like goin' to jail; so we was all mighty glad Tom had thet sixty dollars."

"It was very fortunate," said Beth, filling in another pause.

"The nex' day Tom were as good as his word. He paid Doc Squiers an' got a receipt an' giv it to Lucy. Then we thought th' trouble was over, but it had on'y just begun. Monday mornin' Tom was arrested over t' the mill fer passin' a forged check an' gettin' sixty dollars on it. Lucy was near frantic with grief. She walked all the way to Fairview, an' they let her see Tom in the jail. He tol' her it was true he forged th' check, but he did it to save her. He was a man an' it wouldn't hurt fer him to go to jail so much as it would a girl. He said he was

glad he did it, an' didn't mind servin' a sentence in prison. I think, miss, as Tom meant thet—ev'ry word uv it. But Lucy broke down under the thing an' raved an' cried, an' nuther Nell ner I could do anything with her. She said she'd ruined Tom's life an' all thet, an' she didn't want to live herself. Then she took sick, an' Nell an' I nursed her as careful as we could. How'n the wurld she ever got away we can't make out, nohow."

"Did she get away?" asked the girl, noting that the old man's eyes were full of tears and his lips trembling.

"Yes, miss. She's bin gone over ten days, now, an' we don't even know where to look fer her; our girl—our poor Lucy. She ain't right in her head, ye know, or she'd never a done it. She'd never a left us like this in th' world. 'Taint like our Lucy."

Kenneth had turned around on his stool and was regarding old Will Rogers earnestly, brush and pallet alike forgotten. Beth was trying to keep the tears out of her own eyes, for the old

man's voice was even more pathetic than his words.

"Ten days ago!" said Kenneth. "And she hasn't been found yet?"

"We can't trace her anywhere, an' Nell has broke down at las', an' don't do much but cry. It's hard, sir—I can't bear to see Nell cry. She'd sich high sperrits, onct."

"Where's the boy—Tom?" asked Kenneth, somewhat gruffly.

"He's in the jail yet, waitin' to be tried. Court don't set till next week, they say."

"And where do you live, Rogers?"

"Five miles up the Fairview road. 'Taint much of a place—Nell says I've always bin a shif'les lot, an' I guess it's true. Yesterday your hired men painted all the front o' my fence—painted it white—not only where th' signs was, but th' whole length of it. We didn't ask it done, but they jes' done it. I watched 'em, an' Nell says if we on'y had th' money thet was wasted on thet paint an' labor, we might find our Lucy. 'It's a shame,' says Nell, 'all thet 'lection money

bein' thrown away on paint when it might save our poor crazy child.' I hope it ain't wrong, sir; but thet's what I thought, too. So we laid plans fer me to come here today. Ef I kin get a-hold o' any o' thet money honest, I want to do it."

"Have you got a horse?" asked Kenneth.

"Not now. I owned one las' year, but he died on me an' I can't get another nohow."

"Did you walk here?" asked Beth.

"Yes, miss; o' course. I've walked the hull county over a-tryin' to find Lucy. I don' mind the walking much."

There was another pause, while old Will Rogers looked anxiously at the boy and the girl, and they looked at each other. Then Beth took out her purse.

"I want to hire your services to help us in the election," she said, briskly. "I'll furnish you a horse and buggy and you can drive around and talk with people and try to find Lucy at the same time. This twenty dollars is to help you pay expenses. You needn't account for it; just help us as much as you can."

The old man straightened up and his eyes filled again.

"Nell said if it was a matter o' charity I mustn't take a cent," he observed, in a low voice.

"It isn't charity. It's business. But now that we know your story we mean to help you find your girl. Anyone would do that, you know. Tell me, what is Lucy like?"

"She's like Nell used to be."

"But we don't know your wife. Describe Lucy as well as you can. Is she tall?"

"Middlin', miss."

"Light or dark?"

"Heh?"

"Is her hair light or dark colored?"

"Middlin'; jes' middlin', miss."

"Well, is she stout or thin?"

"I should say sorter betwixt an' between, miss."

"How old is Lucy?"

"Jes' turned eighteen, miss."

"Never mind, Beth," interrupted the boy;

"you won't learn much from old Will's description. But we'll see what can be done tomorrow. Call James and have him sent home in the rig he's going to use. It seems to me you're disposing rather freely of my horses and carts."

"Yes, Ken. You've nothing to say about your belongings just now. But if you object to this plan—"

"I don't. The girl must be found, and her father is more likely to find her than a dozen other searchers. He shall have the rig and welcome."

So it was that Will Rogers drove back to his heart-broken wife in a smart top-buggy, with twenty dollars in his pocket and a heart full of wonder and thanksgiving.

CHAPTER X

THE FORGED CHECK

Kenneth and Beth refrained from telling the other girls or Uncle John of old Will Rogers's visit, but they got Mr. Watson in the library and questioned him closely about the penalty for forging a check.

It was a serious crime indeed, Mr. Watson told them, and Tom Gates bade fair to serve a lengthy term in state's prison as a consequence of his rash act.

"But it was a generous act, too," said Beth.

"I can't see it in that light," said the old lawyer. "It was a deliberate theft from his employers to protect a girl he loved. I do not doubt the girl was unjustly accused. The Squierses are a selfish, hard-fisted lot, and the old lady, especially, is a well known virago. But they could not have proven a case against Lucy,

if she was innocent, and all their threats of arresting her were probably mere bluff. So this boy was doubly foolish in ruining himself to get sixty dollars to pay an unjust demand."

"He was soft-hearted and impetuous," said Beth; "and, being in love, he didn't stop to count the cost."

"That is no excuse, my dear," declared Mr. Watson. "Indeed there is never an excuse for crime. The young man is guilty, and he must suffer the penalty."

"Is there no way to save him?" asked Kenneth.

"If the prosecution were withdrawn and the case settled with the victim of the forged check, then the young man would be allowed his freedom. But under the circumstances I doubt if such an arrangement could be made."

"We're going to try it, anyhow," was the prompt decision.

So as soon as breakfast was over the next morning Beth and Kenneth took one of the automobiles, the boy consenting unwillingly to this sort of locomotion because it would save much

time. Fairview was twelve miles away, but by ten o'clock they drew up at the county jail.

They were received in the little office by a man named Markham, who was the jailer. He was a round-faced, respectable appearing fellow, but his mood was distinctly unsociable.

"Want to see Tom Gates, eh? Well! what for?" he demanded.

"We wish to talk with him," answered Kenneth.

"Talk! what's the good? You're no friend of Tom Gates. I can't be bothered this way, anyhow."

"I am Kenneth Forbes, of Elmhurst. I'm running for Representative on the Republican ticket," said Kenneth, quietly.

"Oh, say! that's different," observed Markham, altering his demeanor. "You mustn't mind my being gruff and grumpy, Mr. Forbes. I've just stopped smoking a few days ago, and it's got on my nerves something awful!"

"May we see Gates at once?" asked Kenneth.

"Sure-ly! I'll take you to his cell, myself. It's just shocking how such a little thing as stop-

pin' smoking will rile up a fellow. Come this way, please."

They followed the jailer along a succession of passages.

"Smoked ever sence I was a boy, you know, an' had to stop last week because Doc said it would kill me if I didn't," remarked the jailer, leading the way. "Sometimes I'm that yearning for a smoke I'm nearly crazy, an' I dunno which is worst, dyin' one way or another. This is Gates' cell—the best in the shop."

He unlocked the door, and called:

"Here's visitors, Tom."

"Thank you, Mr. Markham," replied a quiet voice, as a young man came forward from the dim interior of the cell. "How are you feeling, today?"

"Worse, Tom; worse 'n ever," replied the jailer, gloomily.

"Well, stick it out, old man; don't give in."

"I won't, Tom. Smokin' 'll kill me sure, an' there's a faint hope o' livin' through this struggle to give it up. This visitor is Mr. Forbes of Elmhurst, an' the young lady is——"

"Miss DeGraf," said Kenneth, noticing the boy's face critically, as he stood where the light from the passage fell upon it. "Will you leave us alone, please, Mr. Markham?"

"Sure-ly, Mr. Forbes. You've got twenty minutes according to regulations. I'll come and get you then. Sorry we haven't any reception room in the jail. All visits has to be made in the cells."

Then he deliberately locked Kenneth and Beth in with the forger, and retreated along the passage.

"Sit down, please," said Gates, in a cheerful and pleasant voice. "There's a bench here."

"We've come to inquire about your case, Gates," said Kenneth. "It seems you have forged a check."

"Yes, sir, I plead guilty, although I've been told I ought not to confess. But the fact is that I forged the check and got the money, and I'm willing to stand the consequences."

"Why did you do it?" asked Beth.

He was silent and turned his face away.

A fresh, wholesome looking boy, was Tom

Gates, with steady gray eyes, an intelligent forehead, but a sensitive, rather weak mouth. He was of sturdy, athletic build and dressed neatly in a suit that was of coarse material but well brushed and cared for.

Beth thought his appearance pleasing and manly. Kenneth decided that he was ill at ease and in a state of dogged self-repression.

"We have heard something of your story," said Kenneth, "and are interested in it. But there is no doubt you have acted very foolishly."

"Do you know Lucy, sir?" asked the young man.

"No."

"Lucy is very proud. The thing was killing her, and I couldn't bear it. I didn't stop to think whether it was foolish or not. I did it; and I'm glad I did."

"You have made her still more unhappy," said Beth, gently.

"Yes; she'll worry about me, I know. I'm disgraced for life; but I've saved Lucy from any disgrace, and she's young. She'll forget

me before I've served my term, and—and take up with some other young fellow."

"Would you like that?" asked Beth.

"No, indeed," he replied, frankly. "But it will be best that way. I had to stand by Lucy —she's so sweet and gentle, and so sensitive. I don't say I did right. I only say I'd do the same thing again."

"Couldn't her parents have helped her?" inquired Kenneth.

"No. Old Will is a fine fellow, but poor and helpless since Mrs. Rogers had her accident."

"Oh, did she have an accident?" asked Beth.

"Yes. Didn't you know? She's blind."

"Her husband didn't tell us that," said the girl.

"He was fairly prosperous before that, for Mrs. Rogers was an energetic and sensible woman, and kept old Will hard at work. One morning she tried to light the fire with kerosene, and lost her sight. Then Rogers wouldn't do anything but lead her around, and wait upon her, and the place went to rack and ruin."

"I understand now," said Beth.

"Lucy could have looked after her mother," said young Bates, "but old Will was stubborn and wouldn't let her. So the girl saw something must be done and went to work. That's how all the trouble came about."

He spoke simply, but paced up and down the narrow cell in front of them. It was evident that his feelings were deeper than he cared to make evident.

"Whose name did you sign to the check?" asked Kenneth.

"That of John E. Marshall, the manager of the mill. He is supposed to sign all the checks of the concern. It's a stock company, and rich. I was bookkeeper, so it was easy to get a blank check and forge the signature. As regards my robbing the company, I'll say that I saved them a heavy loss one day. I discovered and put out a fire that would have destroyed the whole plant. But Marshall never even thanked me. He only discharged the man who was responsible for the fire."

"How long ago were you arrested?" asked Beth.

"It's nearly two weeks now. But I'll have a trial in a few days, they say. My crime is so serious that the circuit judge has to sit on the case."

"Do you know where Lucy is?"

"She's at home, I suppose. I haven't heard from her since the day she came here to see me —right after my arrest."

They did not think best to enlighten him at that time. It was better for him to think the girl unfeeling than to know the truth.

"I'm going to see Mr. Marshall," said Kenneth, "and discover what I can do to assist you."

"Thank you, sir. It won't be much, but I'm grateful to find a friend. I'm guilty, you know, and there's no one to blame but myself."

They left him then, for the jailer arrived to unlock the door, and escort them to the office.

"Tom's a very decent lad," remarked the jailer, on the way. "He ain't a natural criminal, you know; just one o' them that gives in to temptation and is foolish enough to get caught.

I've seen lots of that kind in my day. You don't smoke, do you, Mr. Forbes?"

"No, Mr. Markham."

"Then don't begin it; or, if you do, never try to quit. It's—it's *awful,* it is. And it ruins a man's disposition."

The mill was at the outskirts of the town. It was a busy place, perhaps the busiest in the whole of the Eighth District, and in it were employed a large number of men. The office was a small brick edifice, separated from the main buildings, in which the noise of machinery was so great that one speaking could scarcely be heard. The manager was in, Kenneth and Beth learned, but could not see them until he had signed the letters he had dictated for the noon mail.

So they sat on a bench until a summons came to admit them to Mr. Marshall's private office.

He looked up rather ungraciously, but motioned them to be seated.

"Mr. Forbes, of Elmhurst?" he asked, glancing at the card Kenneth had sent in.

"Yes, sir."

"I've been bothered already over your election campaign," resumed the manager, arranging his papers in a bored manner. "Some girl has been here twice to interview my men and I have refused to admit her. You may as well understand, sir, that I stand for the Democratic candidate, and have no sympathy with your side."

"That doesn't interest me, especially, sir," answered Kenneth, smiling. "I'm not electioneering just now. I've come to talk with you about young Gates."

"Oh. Well, sir, what about him?"

"I'm interested in the boy, and want to save him from prosecution."

"He's a forger, Mr. Forbes; a deliberate criminal."

"I admit that. But he's very young, and his youth is largely responsible for his folly."

"He stole my money."

"It is true, Mr. Marshall."

"And he deserves a term in state's prison."

"I agree to all that. Nevertheless, I should like to save him," said Kenneth. "His trial has not yet taken place, and instead of your devoting

considerable of your valuable time appearing against him it would be much simpler to settle the matter right here and now."

"In what way, Mr. Forbes?"

"I'll make your money loss good."

"It has cost me twice sixty dollars in annoyance."

"I can well believe it, sir. I'll pay twice sixty dollars for the delivery to me of the forged check, and the withdrawal of the prosecution."

"And the costs?"

"I'll pay all the costs besides."

"You're foolish. Why should you do all this?"

"I have my own reasons, Mr. Marshall. Please look at the matter from a business standpoint. If you send the boy to prison you will still suffer the loss of the money. By compromising with me you can recover your loss and are paid for your annoyance."

"You're right. Give me a check for a hundred and fifty, and I'll turn over to you the forged check and quash further proceedings."

Kenneth hesitated a moment. He detested the

grasping disposition that would endeavor to take advantage of his evident desire to help young Gates. He had hoped to find Mr. Marshall a man of sympathy; but the manager was as cold as an icicle.

Beth, uneasy at his silence, nudged him.

"Pay it, Ken," she whispered.

"Very well, Mr. Marshall," said he, "I accept your terms."

The check was written and handed over, and Marshall took the forged check from his safe and delivered it, with the other papers in the case, to Mr. Forbes. He also wrote a note to his lawyer directing him to withdraw the prosecution.

Kenneth and Beth went away quite happy with their success, and the manager stood in his little window and watched them depart. There was a grim smile of amusement on his shrewd face.

"Of all the easy marks I ever encountered," muttered Mr. Marshall, "this young Forbes is the easiest. Why, he's a fool, that's what he is! He might have had that forged check for

the face of it, if he'd been sharp. You wouldn't catch 'Rast Hopkins doing such a fool stunt. Not in a thousand years!"

Meantime Beth was pressing Kenneth's arm as she sat beside him and saying happily:

"I'm so glad, Ken—so glad! And to think we can save all that misery and despair by the payment of a hundred and fifty dollars! And now we must find the girl."

"Yes," replied the boy, cheerfully, "we must find Lucy."

CHAPTER XI

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

A woman was sitting in a low room, engaged in knitting. Her feet were stretched out toward a small fire that smouldered in an open hearth. She wore a simple calico gown, neat and well-fitting, and her face bore traces of much beauty that time and care had been unable wholly to efface.

Suddenly she paused in her work, her head turned slightly to one side to listen.

"Come in, sir," she called in a soft but distinct voice; "come in, miss."

So Kenneth and Beth entered at the half-open porch door and advanced into the room.

"Is this Mrs. Rogers?" asked Beth, looking at the woman curiously. The woman's eyes were closed, but the lashes fell in graceful dark curves over her withered cheeks. The girl won-

dered how she had been able to know her visitors' sex so accurately.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Rogers," said the sweet, sad voice. "And I think you are one of the young ladies from Elmhurst—perhaps the one Will talked to."

"You are right, Mrs. Rogers. I am Elizabeth DeGraf."

"And your companion—is it Mr. Forbes?" the woman asked.

"Yes, madam," replied Kenneth, astonished to find Will's wife speaking with so much refinement and gracious ease.

"You are very welcome. Will you please find seats? My affliction renders me helpless, as you may see."

"We are very comfortable, I assure you, Mrs. Rogers," said Beth. "We have come to ask if you have heard anything of your daughter."

"Not a word as yet, Miss DeGraf. Will is out with the horse and buggy doing his best to get information. But Lucy has been gone so long now that I realize it will be difficult to find her, if, indeed, the poor girl has not—is not—"

Her voice broke.

"Oh, you don't fear *that,* do you, Mrs. Rogers?" asked Beth, quickly.

"I fear anything—everything!" wailed the poor creature, the tears streaming from between her closed lids. "My darling was frantic with grief, and she couldn't bear the humiliation and disgrace of her position. Will told you, didn't he?"

"Yes, of course. But it wasn't so bad, Mrs. Rogers; it wasn't a desperate condition, by any means."

"With poor Tom in prison for years—and just for trying to help her."

"Tom isn't in prison, you know, any more," said Beth quietly. "He has been released."

"Released! When?"

"Last evening. His fault has been forgiven, and he is now free."

The woman sat silent for a time. Then she asked:

"You have done this, Mr. Forbes?"

"Why, Miss DeGraf and I assisted, perhaps. The young man is not really bad, and—"

"Tom's a fine boy!" she cried, with eagerness. "He's honest and true, Mr. Forbes—he is, indeed!"

"I think so," said Kenneth.

"If he wasn't my Lucy would never have loved him. He had a bright future before him, sir, and that's why my child went mad when he ruined his life for her sake."

"Was she mad, do you think?" asked Beth, softly.

"She must have been," said the mother, sadly. "Lucy was a sensible girl, and until this thing happened she was as bright and cheerful as the day is long. But she is very sensitive—she inherited that from me, I think—and Tom's action drove her distracted. At first she raved and rambled incoherently, and Will and I feared brain fever would set in. Then she disappeared in the night, without leaving a word or message for us, which was unlike her—and we've never heard a word of her since. The—the river has a strange fascination for people in that condition. At times in my life it has almost drawn *me* into

its depths—and I am not mad. I have never been mad."

"Let us hope for the best, Mrs. Rogers," said Beth. "Somehow, I have an idea this trouble will all turn out well in the end."

"Have you?" asked the woman, earnestly.

"Yes. It all came about through such a little thing—merely an unjust accusation."

"The little things are the ones that ruin lives," she said. "Will you let me tell you something of myself? You have been so kind to us, my dear, that I feel you ought to know."

"I shall be glad to know whatever you care to tell me," said Beth, simply.

"I am the wife of a poor farmer," began the woman, speaking softly and with some hesitation, but gaining strength as she proceeded. "As a girl I was considered attractive, and my father was a man of great wealth and social standing. We lived in Baltimore. Then I fell in love with a young man who, after obtaining my promise to marry him, found some one he loved better and carelessly discarded me. As I have said,

I have a sensitive nature. In my girlhood I was especially susceptible to any slight, and this young man's heartless action made it impossible for me to remain at home and face the humiliation he had thrust upon me. My father was a hard man, and demanded that I marry the man he had himself chosen; but I resented this command and ran away. My mother had passed on long before, and there was nothing to keep me at home. I came west and secured a position to teach school in this county, and for a time I was quite contented and succeeded in living down my disappointment. I heard but once from my father. He had married again and disinherited me. He forbade me to ever communicate with him again.

"At that time Will Rogers was one of the most promising and manly of the country lads around here. He was desperately in love with me, and at this period, when I seemed completely cut off from my old life and the future contained no promise, I thought it best to wear out the remainder of my existence in the seclusion of a farm-house. I put all the past behind me, and

told Will Rogers I would marry him and be a faithful wife; but that my heart was dead. He accepted me on that condition, and it was not until after we were married some time that my husband realized how impossible it would ever be to arouse my affection. Then he lost courage, and became careless and reckless. When our child came—our Lucy—Will was devoted to her, and the baby wakened in me all the old passionate capacity to love. Lucy drew Will and me a little closer together, but he never recovered his youthful ambition. He was a disappointed man, and went from bad to worse. I don't say Will hasn't always been tender and true to me, and absolutely devoted to Lucy. But he lost all hope of being loved as he loved me, and the disappointment broke him down. He became an old man early in life, and his lack of energy kept us very poor. I used to take in sewing before the accident to my eyes, and that helped a good deal to pay expenses. But now I am helpless, and my husband devotes all his time to me, although I beg him to work the farm and try to earn some money.

"I wouldn't have minded the poverty; I wouldn't mind being blind, even, if Lucy had been spared to me. I have had to bear so much in my life that I could even bear my child's death. But to have her disappear and not know what has become of her—whether she is living miserably or lying at the bottom of the river—it is this that is driving me distracted."

Kenneth and Beth remained silent for a time after Mrs. Rogers had finished her tragic story, for their hearts were full of sympathy for the poor woman. It was hard to realize that a refined, beautiful and educated girl had made so sad a mistake of her life and suffered so many afflictions as a consequence. That old Will had never been a fitting mate for his wife could readily be understood, and yet the man was still devoted to his helpless, unresponsive spouse. The fault was not his.

The boy and the girl both perceived that there was but one way they could assist Mrs. Rogers, and that was to discover what had become of her child.

"Was Lucy like you, or did she resemble her father?" asked Beth.

"She is—she was very like me when I was young," replied the woman. "There is a photograph of her on the wall there between the windows; but it was taken five years ago, when she was a child. Now she is—she was eighteen, and a well-developed young woman."

"I've been looking at the picture," said Kenneth.

"And you mustn't think of her as dead, Mrs. Rogers," said Beth, pleadingly. "I'm sure she is alive, and that we shall find her. We're going right to work, and everything possible shall be done to trace your daughter. Don't worry, please. Be as cheerful as you can, and leave the search to us."

The woman sighed.

"Will believes she is alive, too," she said. "He can't sleep or rest till he finds her, for my husband loves her as well as I do. But sometimes I feel it's wicked to hope she is alive. I know what she suffers, for I suffered, myself; and

life isn't worth living when despair and disappointment fills it."

"I cannot see why Lucy shouldn't yet be happy," protested Beth. "Tom Gates is now free, and can begin life anew."

"His trouble will follow him everywhere," said Mrs. Rogers, with conviction. "Who will employ a bookkeeper, or even a clerk who has been guilty of forgery?"

"I think I shall give him employment," replied Kenneth.

"You, Mr. Forbes!"

"Yes. I'm not afraid of a boy who became a criminal to save the girl he loved."

"But all the world knows of his crime!" she exclaimed.

"The world forgets these things sooner than you suppose," he answered. "I need a secretary, and in that position Tom Gates will quickly be able to live down this unfortunate affair. And if he turns out as well as I expect, he will soon be able to marry Lucy and give her a comfortable home. So now nothing remains but to find

your girl, and we'll try to do that, I assure you."

Mrs. Rogers was crying softly by this time, but it was from joy and relief. When they left her she promised to be as cheerful as possible and to look on the bright side of life.

"I can't thank you," she said, "so I won't try. You must know how grateful we are to you."

As Beth and Kenneth drove back to Elmhurst they were both rather silent, for they had been strongly affected by the scene at the farm-house.

"It's so good of you, Ken, to take Tom Gates into your employ," said the girl, pressing her cousin's arm. "And I'm sure he'll be true and grateful."

"I really need him, Beth," said the boy. "There is getting to be too much correspondence for Mr. Watson to attend to, and I ought to relieve him of many other details. It's a good arrangement, and I'm glad I thought of it."

They had almost reached Elmhurst when they met the Honorable Erastus Hopkins driving

along the road. On the seat beside him was a young girl, and as the vehicles passed each other Beth gave a start and clung to the boy's arm.

"Oh, Ken!" she cried, "did you see? Did you see that?"

"Yes; it's my respected adversary."

"But the girl! It's Lucy—I'm sure it's Lucy! She's the living image of Mrs. Rogers! Stop—stop—and let's go back!"

"Nonsense, Beth," said the boy. "It can't be."

"But it is. I'm sure it is!"

"I saw the girl," he said. "She was laughing gaily and talking with the Honorable Erastus. Is that your idea of the mad, broken-hearted Lucy Rogers?"

"N-no. She *was* laughing, Ken, I noticed it."

"And she wasn't unhappy a bit. You mustn't think that every pretty girl with dark eyes you meet is Lucy Rogers, you know. And there's another thing."

"What, Ken?"

"Any companion of Mr. Hopkins can be easily traced."

"That's true," answered the girl, thoughtfully. "I must have been mistaken," she added, with a sigh.

CHAPTER XII

BETH MEETS A REBUFF

The campaign was now growing warm. Mr. Hopkins had come to realize that he had "the fight of his life" on his hands, and that defeat meant his political ruin. Close-fisted and miserly as he was, no one knew so well as the Honorable Erastus how valuable this position of Representative was to him in a financial way, and that by winning re-election he could find means to reimburse himself for all he had expended in the fight. So, to the surprise of the Democratic Committee and all his friends, Mr. Hopkins announced that he would oppose Forbes's aggressive campaign with an equal aggressiveness, and spend as many dollars in doing so as might be necessary.

He did not laugh at his opponents any longer. To himself he admitted their shrewdness and

activity and acknowledged that an experienced head was managing their affairs.

One of Mr. Hopkins's first tasks after calling his faithful henchmen around him was to make a careful canvass of the voters of his district, to see what was still to be accomplished.

This canvass was quite satisfactory, for final report showed only about a hundred majority for Forbes. The district was naturally Republican by six hundred majority, and Hopkins had previously been elected by a plurality of eighty-three; so that all the electioneering of the girl politicians, and the expenditure of vast sums of money in painting fences and barns, buying newspapers and flaunting Forbes banners in the breezes, had not cut into the Hopkins following to any serious extent.

But, to offset this cheering condition, the Democratic agents who made the canvass reported that there was an air of uncertainty throughout the district, and that many of those who declared for Hopkins were lukewarm and faint-hearted, and might easily be induced to change their votes. This was what must be

prevented. The "weak-kneed" contingency must be strengthened and fortified, and a couple of hundred votes in one way or another secured from the opposition.

The Democratic Committee figured out a way to do this. Monroe County, where both Forbes and Hopkins resided, was one of the Democratic strongholds of the State. The portions of Washington and Jefferson Counties included in the Eighth District were as strongly Republican, and being more populous gave to the district its natural Republican majority. On the same ticket that was to elect a Representative to the State Legislature was the candidate for Sheriff of Monroe County. A man named Cummings was the Republican and Seth Reynolds, the liveryman, the Democratic nominee. Under ordinary conditions Reynolds was sure to be elected, but the Committee proposed to sacrifice him in order to elect Hopkins. The Democrats would bargain with the Republicans to vote for the Republican Sheriff if the Republicans would vote for the Democratic Representative. This "trading votes," which was often done, was con-

sidered by the politicians quite legitimate. The only thing necessary was to "fix" Seth Reynolds, and this Hopkins arranged personally. The office of Sheriff would pay about two thousand a year, and this sum Hopkins agreed to pay the liveryman and so relieve him of all the annoyance of earning it.

Reynolds saw the political necessity of this sacrifice, and consented readily to the arrangement. Mr. Cummings, who was to profit by the deal, was called to a private consultation and agreed to slaughter Kenneth Forbes to secure votes for himself. It was thought that this clever arrangement would easily win the fight for Hopkins.

But the Honorable Erastus had no intention of "taking chances," or "monkeying with fate," as he tersely expressed it. Every scheme known to politicians must be worked, and none knew the intricate game better than Hopkins. This was why he held several long conferences with his friend Marshall, the manager at the mill. And this was why Kenneth and Beth discovered him conversing with the young woman in the

buggy. Mr. Hopkins had picked her up from the path leading from the rear gate of the Elmhurst grounds, and she had given him accurate information concerning the movements of the girl campaigners. The description she gave of the coming reception to the Woman's Political League was so humorous and diverting that they were both laughing heartily over the thing when the young people passed them, and thus Mr. Hopkins failed to notice who the occupants of the other vehicle were.

He talked for an hour with the girl, gave her explicit instructions, thrust some money into her hand, and then drove her back to the bend in the path whence she quickly made her way up to the great house.

Louise was making great preparations to entertain the Woman's Political League, an organization she had herself founded, the members of which were wives of farmers in the district. These women were flattered by the attention of the young lady and had promised to assist in electing Mr. Forbes. Louise hoped for excellent results from this organization and wished the

entertainment to be so effective in winning their good-will that they would work earnestly for the cause in which they were enlisted.

Patsy and Beth supported their cousin loyally and assisted in the preparations. The Fairview band was engaged to discourse as much harmony as it could produce, and the resources of the great house were taxed to entertain the guests. Tables were spread on the lawn and a dainty but substantial repast was to be served.

The day of the entertainment was as sunny and mild as heart could desire.

By ten o'clock the farm wagons began to drive up, loaded with women and children, for all were invited except the grown men. This was the first occasion within a generation when such an entertainment had been given at Elmhurst, and the only one within the memory of man where the neighbors and country people had been invited guests. So all were eager to attend and enjoy the novel event.

The gardens and grounds were gaily decorated with Chinese and Japanese lanterns, streamers and Forbes banners. There were great tanks

of lemonade, and tables covered with candies and fruits for the children, and maids and other servants distributed the things and looked after the comfort of the guests. The band played briskly, and before noon the scene was one of great animation. A speakers' stand, profusely decorated, had been erected on the lawn, and hundreds of folding chairs provided for seats. The attendance was unexpectedly large, and the girls were delighted, foreseeing great success for their fête.

"We ought to have more attendants, Beth," said Louise, approaching her cousin. "Won't you run into the house and see if Martha can't spare one or two more maids?"

Beth went at once, and found the housekeeper in her little room. Martha was old and somewhat feeble in body, but her mind was still active and her long years of experience in directing the household at Elmhurst made her a very useful and important personage. She was very fond of the young ladies, whom she had known when Aunt Jane was the mistress here, and Beth was her especial favorite.

So she greeted the girl cordially, and said:

"Maids? My dear, I haven't another one to give you, and my legs are too tottering to be of any use. I counted on Eliza Parsons, the new girl I hired for the linen room and to do mending; but Eliza said she had a headache this morning and couldn't stand the sun. So I let her off. But she didn't seem very sick to me."

"Perhaps she is better and will help us until after the luncheon is served," said Beth. "Where is she, Martha? I'll go and ask her."

"I'd better show you the way, miss. She's in her own room."

The housekeeper led the way and Beth followed. When she rapped upon the door, a sweet, quiet voice said:

"Come in."

The girl entered, and gave an involuntary cry of surprise. Standing before her was the young girl she had seen riding with Mr. Hopkins—the girl she had declared to be the missing daughter of Mrs. Rogers.

For a moment Beth stood staring, while the

new maid regarded her with composure and a slight smile upon her beautiful face. She was dressed in the regulation costume of the maids at Elmhurst, a plain black gown with white apron and cap.

"I—I beg your pardon," said Beth, with a slight gasp; for the likeness to Mrs. Rogers was something amazing. "Aren't you Lucy Rogers?"

The maid raised her eyebrows with a gesture of genuine surprise. Then she gave a little laugh, and replied:

"No, Miss Beth. I'm Elizabeth Parsons."

"But it can't be," protested the girl. "How do you know my name, and why haven't I seen you here before?"

"I'm not a very important person at Elmhurst," replied Eliza, in a pleasant, even tone. "I obtained the situation only a few days ago. I attend to the household mending, you know, and care for the linen. But one can't be here without knowing the names of the young ladies, so I recognize you as Miss Beth, one of Mr. Forbes's cousins."

"You speak like an educated person," said Beth, wonderingly. "Where is your home?"

For the first time the maid seemed a little confused, and her gaze wandered from the face of her visitor.

"Will you excuse my answering that question?" she asked.

"It is very simple and natural," persisted Beth. "Why cannot you answer it?"

"Excuse me, please. I—I am not well today. I have a headache."

She sat down in a rocking chair, and clasping her hands in her lap, rocked slowly back and forth.

"I'm sorry," said Beth. "I hoped you would be able to assist me on the lawn. There are so many people that we can't give them proper attention."

Eliza Parsons shook her head.

"I am not able," she declared. "I abhor crowds. They—they excite me, in some way, and I—I can't bear them. You must excuse me."

Beth looked at the strange girl without taking

the hint to retire. Somehow, she could not rid herself of the impression that whether or not she was mistaken in supposing Eliza to be the missing Lucy, she had stumbled upon a sphinx whose riddle was well worth solving.

But Eliza bore the scrutiny with quiet unconcern. She even seemed mildly amused at the attention she attracted. Beth was a beautiful girl—the handsomest of the three cousins, by far; yet Eliza surpassed her in natural charm, and seemed well aware of the fact. Her manner was neither independent nor assertive, but rather one of well-bred composure and calm reliance. Beth felt that she was intruding and knew that she ought to go; yet some fascination held her to the spot. Her eyes wandered to the maid's hands. However her features and form might repress any evidence of nervousness, these hands told a different story. The thin fingers clasped and unclasped in little spasmodic jerks and belied the quiet smile upon the face above them.

"I wish," said Beth, slowly, "I knew you."

A sudden wave of scarlet swept over Eliza's

face. She rose quickly to her feet, with an impetuous gesture that made her visitor catch her breath.

"I wish I knew myself," she cried, fiercely. "Why do you annoy me in this manner? What am I to you? Will you leave me alone in my own room, or must I go away to escape you?"

"I will go," said Beth, a little frightened at the passionate appeal.

Eliza closed the door behind her with a decided slam, and a key clicked in the lock. The sound made Beth indignant, and she hurried back to where her cousins were busy with the laughing, chattering throng of visitors.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BOOMERANG

The lawn fête was a tremendous success, and every farmer's wife was proud of her satin badge bearing the monogram: "W. P. L.," and the words: "FORBES FOR REPRESENTATIVE."

Certain edibles, such as charlotte-russe, Spanish cream, wine jellies and mousses, to say nothing of the caviare and anchovies, were wholly unknown to them; but they ate the dainties with a wise disregard of their inexperience and enjoyed them immensely.

The old butler was a general in his way, and in view of the fact that the staff of servants at Elmhurst was insufficient to cope with such a throng, he allowed Louise to impress several farmers' daughters into service, and was able

to feed everyone without delay and in an abundant and satisfactory manner.

After luncheon began the speech-making, interspersed with music by the band.

Louise made the preliminary address, and, although her voice was not very strong, the silent attention of her hearers permitted her to be generally understood.

She called attention to the fact that this campaign was important because it promised more beautiful and attractive houses for the farmers and townsmen alike.

"We had all grown so accustomed to advertising signs," she said, "that we failed to notice how thick they were becoming or how bold and overpowering. From a few scattered announcements on fence boards, they had crowded themselves into more prominent places until the barns and sheds and the very rocks were daubed with glaring letters asking us to buy the medicines, soaps, tobaccos, and other wares the manufacturers were anxious to sell. Every country road became an advertising avenue. Scarcely a country house was free from signs of some

sort. Yet the people tamely submitted to this imposition because they knew no way to avoid it. When Mr. Forbes began his campaign to restore the homesteads to their former beauty and dignity, a cry was raised against him. But this was because the farmers did not understand how much this reform meant to them. So we gave them an object lesson. We painted out all the signs in this section at our own expense, that you might see how much more beautiful your homes are without them. We believe that none of you will ever care to allow advertising signs on your property again, and that the quiet refinement of this part of the country will induce many other places to follow our example, until advertisers are forced to confine themselves to newspapers, magazines and circulars, their only legitimate channels. This much Mr. Forbes has already done for you, and he will now tell you what else, if he is elected, he proposes to do."

Kenneth then took the platform and was welcomed with a hearty cheer. He modestly assured them that a Representative in the State Legislature could accomplish much good for his

district if he honestly desired to do so. That was what a Representative was for—to represent his people. It was folly to elect any man who would forget that duty and promote only his own interests through the position of power to which the people had appointed him. Mr. Forbes admitted that he had undertaken this campaign because he was opposed to offensive advertising signs; but now he had become interested in other issues, and was anxious to be elected so that he could carry on the work of reform. They needed more school-houses for their children, and many other things which he hoped to provide as their Representative.

During this oration Beth happened to glance up at the house, and her sharp eyes detected the maid, Eliza, standing shielded behind the half-closed blind of an upper window and listening to, as well as watching, the proceedings below. Then she remembered how the girl had been laughing and talking with Mr. Hopkins, when she first saw her, and with sudden dismay realized that Eliza was a spy in the service of the enemy.

Her first impulse was to denounce the maid at once, and have her discharged; but the time was not opportune, so she waited until the festivities were ended.

It had been a great day for the families of the neighboring farmers, and they drove homeward in the late afternoon full of enthusiasm over the royal manner in which they had been entertained and admiration for the girls who had provided the fun and feasting. Indeed, there were more kindly thoughts expressed for the inhabitants of Elmhurst than had ever before been heard in a single day in the history of the county, and the great and the humble seemed more closely drawn together.

When the last guest had departed Beth got her cousins and Kenneth together and told them of her discovery of the spy.

Kenneth was at first greatly annoyed, and proposed to call Martha and have the false maid ejected from the premises; but Patsy's wise little head counselled caution in handling the matter.

"Now that we know her secret," she said, "the girl cannot cause us more real harm, and

there may be a way to circumvent this unscrupulous Hopkins and turn the incident to our own advantage. Let's think it over carefully before we act."

"There's another thing," said Beth, supporting her cousin. "I'm interested in the mystery surrounding the girl. I now think I was wrong in suspecting her to be the lost Lucy Rogers; but there is surely some romance connected with her, and she is not what she seems to be. I'd like to study her a little."

"It was absurd to connect her with Lucy Rogers," observed Kenneth, "for there is nothing in her character to remind one of the unhappy girl."

"Except her looks," added Beth. "She's the living image of Mrs. Rogers."

"That isn't important," replied Louise. "It is probably a mere coincidence. None of us have ever seen the real Lucy, and she may not resemble her mother at all."

"Mrs. Rogers claims she does," said Beth. "But anyhow, I have a wish to keep this girl at the house, where I can study her character."

"Then keep her, my dear," decided Kenneth. "I'll set a couple of men to watch the gates, and if she goes out we'll know whom she meets. The most she can do is to report our movements to Mr. Hopkins, and there's no great harm in that."

So the matter was left, for the time; and as if to verify Beth's suspicions Eliza was seen to leave the grounds after dusk and meet Mr. Hopkins in the lane. They conversed together a few moments, and then the maid calmly returned and went to her room.

The next day Mr. Hopkins scattered flaring hand-bills over the district which were worded in a way designed to offset any advantage his opponent had gained from the lawn fête of the previous day. They read: "Hopkins, the Man of the Times, is the Champion of the Signs of the Times. Forbes, who never earned a dollar in his life, but inherited his money, is trying to take the dollars out of the pockets of the farmers by depriving them of the income derived by selling spaces for advertising signs. He is robbing the farmers while claiming he wants

to beautify their homes. The farmers can't eat beauty; they want money. Therefore they are going to vote for the Honorable Erastus Hopkins for Representative." Then followed an estimate of the money paid the farmers of the district by the advertisers during the past five years, amounting to several thousands of dollars in the aggregate. The circular ended in this way: "Hopkins challenges Forbes to deny these facts. Hopkins is willing to meet Forbes before the public at any time and place he may select, to settle this argument in joint debate."

The girls accepted the challenge at once. Within two days every farmer had received a notice that Mr. Forbes would meet Mr. Hopkins at the Fairview Opera House on Saturday afternoon to debate the question as to whether advertising signs brought good or evil to the community.

The campaign was now getting hot. Because of the activity of the opposing candidates every voter in the district had become more or less interested in the fight, and people were taking one side or the other with unusual earnestness.

Mr. Hopkins was not greatly pleased that his challenge had been accepted. He had imagined that the Forbes party would ignore it and leave him the prestige of crowing over his opponent's timidity. But he remembered how easily he had subdued Kenneth at the school-house meeting before the nominations, and had no doubt of his ability to repeat the operation.

He was much incensed against the girls who were working for Kenneth Forbes, for he realized that they were proving an important factor in the campaign. He even attributed to them more than they deserved, for Uncle John's telling activities were so quietly conducted that he was personally lost sight of entirely by Mr. Hopkins.

Mr. Hopkins had therefore become so enraged that, against the advice of his friends, he issued a circular sneering at "Women in Politics." The newspapers having been subsidized by the opposition so early in the game, Mr. Hopkins had been driven to employ the circular method of communicating with the voters. Scarcely a day passed now that his corps of distributors did

not leave some of his literature at every dwelling in the district.

His tirade against the girls was neither convincing nor in good taste. He asked the voters if they were willing to submit to "petticoat government," and permit a "lot of boarding-school girls, with more boldness than modesty" to dictate the policies of the community. "These frizzle-headed females," continued the circular, "are trying to make your wives and daughters as rebellious and unreasonable as they are themselves; but no man of sense will permit a woman to influence his vote. It is a disgrace to this district that Mr. Forbes allows his girlish campaign to be run by a lot of misses who should be at home darning stockings; or, if they were not able to do that, practicing their music-lessons."

"Good!" exclaimed shrewd Miss Patsy, when she read this circular. "If I'm not much mistaken, Mr. Hopkins has thrown a boomerang. Every woman who attended the fête is now linked with us as an ally, and every one of them will resent this foolish circular."

"I'm sorry," said Kenneth, "that you girls should be forced to endure this. I feared something like it when you insisted on taking a hand in the game."

But they laughed at him and at Mr. Hopkins, and declared they were not at all offended.

"One cannot touch pitch without being defiled," said Mr. Watson, gravely, "and politics, as Mr. Hopkins knows it, is little more than pitch."

"I cannot see that there is anything my girls have done to forfeit respect and admiration," asserted Uncle John, stoutly. "To accuse them of boldness or immodesty is absurd. They have merely gone to work in a business-like manner and used their wits and common-sense in educating the voters. Really, my dears, I'm more proud of you today than I've ever been before," he concluded.

And Uncle John was right. There had been no loss of dignity by any one of the three, and their evident refinement, as well as their gentleness and good humor, had until now protected

them from any reproach. It had remained for Mr. Hopkins to accuse them, and his circular had a wide influence in determining the issue of the campaign.

CHAPTER XIV

LUCY'S GHOST

Kenneth had sent word to Tom Gates, asking the young man to come to Elmhurst, but it was not until two days after the lawn party that Tom appeared and asked permission to see Mr. Forbes.

Beth and Louise were with Kenneth at the time, and were eager to remain during the interview, so the young man was shown into the library.

Beth could scarcely recognize in him the calm and cheerful Tom Gates they had visited in the county jail; for his face was drawn with care and anxiety, his eyes were bloodshot, and his former neat appearance was changed to one careless and untidy.

Kenneth scrutinized him closely.

"What have you been up to, Tom?" he asked.

"I've been searching for Lucy, sir, night and day. I haven't slept a wink since I heard the awful news of her sickness and escape. Where do you think she can be, sir?"

His question was full of agonized entreaty, and his manner pitifully appealing.

"I don't know," answered Kenneth. "Where have you searched?"

"Everywhere, sir, that she might be likely to go. I've inquired in every town, and along every road leading out of the county. She didn't take a train, because poor Lucy hadn't any money —and I've asked at all the stations. And—and —along the river they say no girl answering her description has been seen."

"It's strange," remarked Kenneth, thoughtfully, while the girls regarded the youth with silent sympathy.

"If you knew Lucy, sir, you'd realize how strange it is," went on young Gates, earnestly. "She was such a gentle, shrinking girl, as shy and retiring as a child. And she never did a thing that would cause anyone the least worry or unhappiness. But she was out of her head,

sir, and didn't know what she was about. That was the reason she went away. And from the moment she left her home all trace of her was lost."

"One would think," observed Kenneth, "that a poor, demented girl, wandering about the country, would be noticed by scores of people. Did she take any clothing with her?"

"Only the dress she had on, sir, and not even a hat or a shawl."

"What was her dress like?" asked Beth, quickly.

"It was a light grey in color, and plainly made. She wore a white collar; but that is all we can be certain she had on. You see her mother is blind, and old Will doesn't observe very closely."

"Does Lucy resemble her mother?" inquired Beth.

"Very much, miss. She was a beautiful girl, everyone acknowledged. And it's all my fault —all my fault. I thought to save her, and drove her mad, instead!"

"You might have known that," declared Ken-

neth. "A girl of her character, sensitive to a fault, would be greatly shocked to find the man she loved a criminal."

"It was for her sake."

"That is a poor excuse. If you had waited Lucy would have proved her innocence."

"They threatened to arrest her, sir. It would have killed her."

"They wouldn't dare arrest her on suspicion."

"The Squierses would dare do anything. You don't know old Mrs. Squiers."

"I know the law, sir, and in any event it was a foolish thing, as well as criminal, to forge a check to get the money they demanded."

"You are right, sir," replied Tom Gates, despondently. "It was foolish and criminal. I wouldn't mind my own punishment, but it drove my Lucy mad."

"See here," said Kenneth, sternly, "you are getting morbid, young man, and pretty soon you'll be mad yourself. If Lucy is found do you want her to see you in this condition?"

"Can she be found, sir, do you think?"

"We are trying to find her," replied Kenneth.

"You have failed, it seems, and Will Rogers had failed. I've had one of the cleverest detectives of Chicago trying to find her for the last three days."

"Oh, Kenneth!" exclaimed Beth. "I didn't know that. How good of you!"

"It must have been the detective that came to see Mrs. Rogers," said Tom, musingly. "She told me a strange man had been there from Mr. Forbes, to inquire all about Lucy."

"Yes; he makes a report to me every evening," remarked Kenneth; "and Mr. Burke says this is the most mystifying case he has ever encountered. So far there isn't a clew to follow. But you may rest assured that what any man can do, Burke will do."

"I'm so grateful, sir!" said Tom.

"Then you must show it by being a man, and not by giving way to your trouble in this foolish manner."

"I'll try, sir, now that there's something to hope for."

"There's a good deal to hope for. Despair won't help you. You must go to work."

"I will. It won't be very easy to get work, for I've disgraced myself in this neighborhood, and I can't leave here till something is known of Lucy's fate. But I'll do something—any kind of work—if I can get it."

"I need someone to assist me in my correspondence," said Kenneth. "Would you like to be my secretary?"

"Me, Mr. Forbes—me!"

"Yes, Tom. I'll pay you twenty dollars a week to start with, and more if you serve me faithfully. And you'll board here, of course."

Then Tom Gates broke down and began to cry like a child, although he tried hard to control himself.

"You—you must forgive me, Mr. Forbes," he said, penitently; "I—I've been without sleep for so long that I haven't any nerves left."

"Then you must go to sleep now, and get a good rest." He turned to Beth. "Will you see Martha," he asked, "and have her give Tom Gates a room?"

She went on her errand at once, and gradually the young man recovered his composure.

"I can do typewriting and stenography, Mr. Forbes," he said, "and I can keep accounts. I'll serve you faithfully, sir."

"We'll talk of all this by and by, Tom," replied Kenneth, kindly. "Just now you must have some sleep and get your strength back. And don't worry about Lucy. Burke will do everything that can be done, and I am confident he will be able to trace the girl in time."

"Thank you, sir."

Then he followed the butler away to his room, and after the girls had discussed him and expressed their sympathy for the unfortunate fellow, they all turned their attention to the important matter of the campaign. The debate with Hopkins was the thing that occupied them just now, and when Patsy joined the group of workers they began to discuss some means of scoring a decisive victory at the Fairview Opera House. The Honorable Erastus still insisted upon making the anti-sign fight the prominent issue of the campaign, and they must reply forcibly to the misleading statements made in his last hand-bill.

Meantime Tom Gates was sunk in the deep sleep of physical exhaustion, and the day wore away before he wakened. When at last he regained consciousness he found the sun sinking in the west and feared he had been guilty of indiscretion. He remembered that he was Mr. Forbes's secretary now, and that Mr. Forbes might want him. He was not yet thoroughly rested, but night was approaching and he reflected that he could obtain all the sleep that he needed then.

So, greatly refreshed, and in a quieter mood than he had been for days, the young man dressed and entered the hall to find his way downstairs.

It happened that Beth, whose room was near this rear corridor, had just gone there to dress for dinner, and as she was closing her door she heard a wild, impassioned cry:

"Lucy!"

Quickly she sprang out into the hall and turned the corner in time to see a strange tableau.

Young Gates was standing with his arms out-

stretched toward Eliza Parsons, who, a few paces away, had her back to the door of her own chamber, from which she had evidently just stepped. She stood motionless, looking curiously at the youth who confronted her.

"Lucy! don't you know me?" he asked, his voice trembling with emotion.

"To begin with," said the girl, composedly, "my name happens to be Eliza. And as we've not been properly introduced I really don't see why I should know you," she added, with a light laugh.

Tom Gates shrank away from her as if he had been struck.

"You can't be Lucy!" he murmured. "And yet—and yet—oh, you *must* be Lucy! You must know me! Look at me, dear—I'm Tom. I'm your own Tom, Lucy!"

"It's very gratifying, I'm sure, young man," said the girl, a touch of scorn in her tones. "If you're my own Tom you'll perhaps stand out of my way and let me go to my work."

Without another word he backed up again

the wall and permitted her to sweep by him, which she did with a gesture of disdain.

When Eliza Parsons had disappeared down the back stairs Beth drew a long breath and approached Tom Gates, who still stood by the wall staring at the place where the girl had disappeared.

"I overheard," said Beth. "Tell me, Tom, is she really like Lucy?"

He looked at her with a dazed expression, as if he scarcely comprehended her words.

"Could you have been mistaken?" persisted the questioner.

He passed his hand over his eyes and gave a shudder.

"Either it was Lucy or her ghost," he muttered.

"Eliza Parsons is no ghost," declared Beth. "She's one of the maids here at Elmhurst, and you're quite likely to see her again."

"Has she been here long?" he asked, eagerly.

"No; only a few days."

"Oh!"

"When I first saw her I was struck by her

resemblance to Mrs. Rogers," continued the girl.

"But she's so different," said Tom, choking back a sob. "Lucy couldn't be so—so airy, so heartless. She isn't at all that style of a girl, miss."

"She may be acting," suggested Beth.

But he shook his head gloomily.

"No; Lucy couldn't act that way. She's quick and impulsive, but she—she couldn't act. And she wouldn't treat me that way, either, Miss Beth. Lucy and I have been sweethearts for years, and I know every expression of her dear face. But the look that this girl gave me was one that my Lucy never could assume. I must have been mistaken. I—I'm sure I was mistaken."

Beth sighed. She was disappointed.

"I suppose," continued Tom, "that I've thought of Lucy so long and so much, lately, and worried so over her disappearance, that I'm not quite myself, and imagined this girl was more like her than she really is. What did you say her name was?"

"Eliza Parsons."

"Thank you. Can you tell me where I'll find Mr. Forbes?"

"He's getting ready for dinner, now, and won't need you at present."

"Then I'll go back to my room. It—it was a great shock to me, that likeness, Miss De-Graf."

"I can well believe it," said Beth; and then she went to her own apartment, greatly puzzled at a resemblance so strong that it had even deceived Lucy Rogers's own sweetheart.

CHAPTER XV

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

"If she is really Lucy Rogers, she'll be missing tomorrow morning," said Beth when she had told her cousins of the encounter in the corridor.

But Eliza Parsons was still at Elmhurst the next day, calmly pursuing her duties, and evidently having forgotten or decided to ignore the young man who had so curiously mistaken her for another. Beth took occasion to watch her movements, so far as she could, and came to the conclusion that the girl was not acting a part. She laughed naturally and was too light-hearted and gay to harbor a care of any sort in her frivolous mind.

But there was a mystery about her; that could not be denied. Even if she were but a paid

spy of Erastus Hopkins there was a story in this girl's life, brief as it had been.

Beth was full of curiosity to know this story.

As for Tom Gates, he had been so horrified by his mistake that he tried to avoid meeting Eliza again. This was not difficult because the girl kept pretty closely to the linen room, and Tom was chiefly occupied in the library.

Kenneth had little chance to test his secretary's abilities just then, because the girls pounced upon the new recruit and used his services in a variety of ways. Tom Gates's anxiety to give satisfaction made him willing to do anything, but they refrained from sending him often to town because he was sensitive to the averted looks and evident repulsion of those who knew he had recently been a "jail-bird." But there was plenty for him to do at Elmhurst, where they were all as busy as bees; and whatever the young man undertook he accomplished in a satisfactory manner.

Saturday forenoon the three girls, with Kenneth, Mr. Watson and Uncle John, rode over to Fairview to prepare for the debate that was to

take place in the afternoon, leaving only Tom Gates at home. As Mr. Hopkins had thrust upon his opponent the task of naming the place and time, the Republican candidate was obliged to make all the arrangements, and pay all the costs. But whatever the girl managers undertook they did well. So the Opera House had been in the hands of a special committee for two days, the orchestra had been hired, and the news of the joint debate had spread far and wide.

The party from Elmhurst lunched at the Fairview Hotel, and then the girls hurried to the Opera House while Kenneth remained to attend a conference of the Republican Committee. These gentlemen were much worried over the discovery of a scheme to trade votes that had been sprung, and that Forbes and Reynolds were being sacrificed for Hopkins and Cummings. Mr. Cummings was called into the meeting, and he denied that the trading was being done with his consent, but defiantly refused to make a public announcement to that effect.

The matter was really serious, because every vote lost in that way counted as two for the

other side, and Hopkins's rabid hand-bills had influenced many of the more ignorant voters and created endless disputes that were not of benefit to the Republican party.

"As nearly as we can figure from our recent canvass," said Mr. Cunningham, the chairman, "we are fast losing ground, and our chances of success are smaller than if no interest in the election had been aroused. Hopkins has cut our majority down to nothing, and it will be a hard struggle to carry our ticket through to success. This is the more discouraging because Mr. Forbes has spent so much money, while Hopkins's expenses have been very little."

"I do not mind that," said Kenneth, quietly. "It was my desire that the voters should fully understand the issues of the campaign. Then, if they vote against me, it is because they are not worthy of honest representation in the Legislature, and I shall in the future leave them to their own devices."

The committee adjourned a little before two o'clock with rather grave faces, and prepared to attend the debate at the Opera House. Mr. Cun-

ningham feared this debate would prove a mistake, as it would give Hopkins a chance to ridicule and brow-beat his opponent in public, and his greatest talent as a speaker lay in that direction.

As Kenneth and his supporters approached the Opera House they heard loud cheering, and from a band-wagon covered with bunting and banners, in which he had driven to the meeting, descended the Honorable Erastus. He met Kenneth face to face, and the latter said pleasantly:

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hopkins."

"Ah, it's Forbes, isn't it?" replied Hopkins, slightingly. "I've met you before, somewheres, haven't I?"

"You have, sir."

"Glad you're here, Forbes; glad you're here," continued the Representative, airily, as he made his way through the crowd that blocked the entrance. "These meetings are educational to young men. Girls all well, I hope?"

There was a boisterous laugh at this sally, and Mr. Hopkins smiled and entered the Opera House, while Kenneth followed with the feeling

that he would take great delight in punching the Honorable Erastus's nose at the first opportunity.

The house was packed full of eager spectators who had come to see "the fun." Although the girls had taken charge of all the arrangements they had devoted the left side of the ample stage to the use of the Hopkins party, where a speaker's table and chairs for important guests had been placed. The right side was similarly arranged for the Forbes party, and between the two the entire center of the stage was occupied by a group of fifty young girls. Above this group a great banner was suspended, reading: "The Signs of the Times," a catchword Mr. Hopkins had employed throughout the campaign. But the most astonishing thing was the appearance of the group of girls. They all wore plain white slips, upon which a variety of signs had been painted in prominent letters. Some costumes advertised baking-powders, others patent medicines, others soaps, chewing tobacco, breakfast foods, etc. From where they were seated in full view of the vast audience the girls appeared as a mass of advertising signs, and the banner

above them indicated quite plainly that these were the "Signs of the Times."

Mr. Hopkins, as he observed this scene, smiled with satisfaction. He believed some of his friends had prepared this display to assist him and to disconcert the opposition, for nothing could have clinched his arguments better than the pretty young girls covered with advertisements of well known products. Even the Eagle Eye Breakfast Food was well represented.

After the orchestra had finished a selection, Mr. Hopkins rose to make the first argument and was greeted with cheers.

"We are having a jolly campaign, my dear friends," he began; "but you musn't take it altogether as a joke; because, while Mr. Forbes's erratic views and actions have done little real harm, we have been educated to an appreciation of certain benefits we enjoy which otherwise might have escaped our attention.

"This is a progressive, strenuous age, and no section of the country has progressed more rapidly than this, the Eighth District of our great and glorious State. I may say without danger

of contradiction that the people I have the honor to represent in the State Legislature, and expect to have the honor of representing the next term, are the most intelligent, the most thoughtful and the most prosperous to be found in any like district in the United States. (Cheers.) Who, then, dares to denounce them as fools? Who dares interfere with these liberties, who dares intrude uninvited into their premises and paint out the signs they have permitted to occupy their fences and barns and sheds? Who would do these things but an impertinent meddler who is so inexperienced in life that he sets his own flimsy judgment against that of the people?"

The orator paused impressively to wait for more cheers, but the audience was silent. In the outskirts of the crowd a faint hissing began to be heard. It reached the speaker's ear and he hurriedly resumed the oration.

"I do not say Mr. Forbes is not a good citizen," said he, "but that he is misguided and unreasonable. A certain degree of deference is due the young man because he inherited considerable wealth from his uncle, and—"

Again the hisses began, and Mr. Hopkins knew he must abandon personal attacks or he would himself be discredited before his hearers. Kenneth and his supporters sat silent in their places, the three girls, who were now well known in the district, forming part of the Republican group; and none of them displayed the least annoyance at the vituperation Mr. Hopkins had employed.

"I have already called your attention in my circulars," resumed the speaker, "to the fact that advertising signs are the source of large income to the farmers of this district. I find that three thousand, seven hundred and eighty-three dollars have been paid the farmers in the last five years, without the least trouble or expense on their part; and this handsome sum of money belongs to them and should not be taken away. Stop and think for a moment. Advertising is the life of every business, and to fight successfully the great army of advertisers whose business is the life-blood of our institutions is as impossible as it is absurd. Suppose every farmer in this district refused to permit signs upon his property; what would be the result? Why, the farmers of other

sections would get that much more money for letting privileges, and you would be that much out of pocket without suppressing the evil—if evil can attach to an industry that pays you good money without requiring either investment or labor in return."

After continuing in this strain for some time, Mr. Hopkins announced that "he would now give way to his youthful and inexperienced opponent," and asked the audience to be patient with Mr. Forbes and considerate of "his extraordinary prejudices."

Hopkins's policy of discrediting his opponent in advance was not very effective, for when Kenneth arose he was more enthusiastically cheered than Hopkins had been. The meeting was disposed to be fair-minded and quite willing to give Mr. Forbes a chance to explain his position.

"The arguments of our distinguished Representative are well worthy of your consideration," he began, quietly. "It is only by understanding fully both sides of an argument that you can hope to arrive at a just and impartial decision. Mr. Hopkins has advocated advertising signs on the

ground that your financial gain warrants permitting them to be placed upon your premises. I will not deny his statement that three thousand, seven hundred and eighty-three dollars have been paid the farmers of this district by advertisers in the last five years. It is quite likely to be true. I have here the report of the Department of Agriculture showing that the total amount paid to farmers of the eighth district in the last five years, for produce of all kinds, is eleven millions, five-hundred thousand dollars."

A murmur of amazement rose from the audience. Kenneth waited until it had subsided.

"This seems surprising, at first," he said, "and proves how startling aggregate figures are. You must remember I have covered five years in this estimate, as did Mr. Hopkins in his, and if you will figure it out you will see that the yearly average of earnings is about six hundred dollars to each farmer. That is a good showing, for we have a wealthy district; but it is not surprising when reduced to that basis. Mr. Hopkins states that the farmers of this district received three thousand, seven hundred and eighty-three dollars

during the last five years for advertising signs. Let us examine these figures. One-fifth of that sum is seven hundred and fifty-six dollars and sixty cents as the income to you per year. We have, in this district, twenty-five hundred farmers according to the latest reports of the Bureau of Statistics, and dividing seven hundred and fifty-six dollars and sixty cents by twenty-five hundred, we find that each farmer receives an average of thirty and one-quarter cents per year for allowing his fences and buildings to be smothered in lurid advertising signs. So we find that the money received by the farmers from the advertising amounts to about one-quarter of one per cent of their income, a matter so insignificant that it cannot affect them materially, one way or another.

"But, Mr. Hopkins states that you give nothing in return for this one-quarter of one per cent, while I claim you pay tremendously for it. For you sacrifice the privacy of your homes and lands, and lend yourselves to the selfish desire of advertisers to use your property to promote their sales. You have been given an example of

clean barns and fences, and I cannot tell you how proud I am of this district when I ride through it and see neatly painted barns and fences replacing the flaring and obtrusive advertising signs that formerly disfigured the highways. Why should you paint advertising signs upon your barns any more than upon your houses? Carry the thing a step farther, and you may as well paint signs upon your children's dresses, in the manner you see illustrated before you."

At this, Louise made a signal and the fifty children so grotesquely covered with signs rose and stepped forward upon the stage. The orchestra struck up an air and the little girls sang the following ditty:

"Teas and soaps,
Pills and dopes,
We all must advertise.
Copper cents,
Not common sense,
Are the things we prize.
We confess
Such a dress
Isn't quite becoming,
But we suppose
Hopkins knows
This keeps business humming."

As the girls ceased singing, Kenneth said:

"To the encroaching advertiser these signs of the times are considered legitimate. There is no respect for personal privacy on the advertiser's part. Once they used only the newspapers, the legitimate channels for advertising. Then they began painting their advertising on your fences. When the farmers protested against this the advertisers gave them a few pennies as a sop to quiet them. After this they gave you small sums to paint the broad sides of your barns, your board fences, and to place signs in your field. If you allowed them to do so they would paint signs on the dresses of your children and wives, so callous are they to all decency and so regardless of private rights. Look on this picture, my friends, and tell me, would you prefer to see this —or this?"

At the word each child pulled away the sign-painted slip and stood arrayed in a pretty gown of spotless white.

The surprise was so complete that the audience cheered, shouted and laughed for several minutes

before silence was restored. Then the children sang another verse, as follows:

"Now it is clear
That we appear
Just as we should be;
We are seen
Sweet and clean
From corruption free:
We're the signs
Of the times——
Fair as heaven's orbs.
If we look good,
Then all men should
Vote for Kenneth Forbes!"

The cheering was renewed at this, and Mr. Hopkins became angry. He tried to make himself heard, but the popular fancy had been caught by the object lesson so cleverly placed before them, and they shouted: "Forbes! Forbes! Forbes!" until the Honorable Erastus became so furious that he left the meeting in disgust.

This was the most impolite thing he could have done, but he vowed that the meeting had been "packed" with Forbes partisans and that he was wasting his time in addressing them.

After he was gone Kenneth resumed his speech and created more enthusiasm. The

victory was certainly with the Republican candidate, and the Elmhurst people returned home thoroughly satisfied with the result of the "joint debate."

CHAPTER XVI

A CLEW AT LAST

The servants at Elmhurst all ate in a pleasant dining room with windows facing a garden of geraniums. Tom Gates had been at the house two days before he encountered Eliza Parsons at the table, for the servants were not all able to take their meals at the same time.

It was at luncheon, the day of the joint debate at Fairview, that the young man first met Eliza, who sat opposite him. The only other person present was old Donald, the coachman, who was rather deaf and never paid any attention to the chatter around him.

As he took his seat Tom gave a half-frightened glance into Eliza's face and then turned red as she smiled coquettishly and said:

"Dear me! It's the young man who called me his dear Lucy."

"You—you're very like her," stammered Tom,

unable to take his eyes from her face. "Even now I—I can't believe I'm mistaken."

She laughed merrily in a sweet, musical voice, and then suddenly stopped with her hand on her heart and cast at him a startled look that was in such sharp contrast to her former demeanor that he rose from his chair.

"Sit down, please," she said, slowly. And then she studied his face with sober earnestness—with almost wistful longing. But she shook her head presently, and sighed; and a moment later had regained her lightness of manner.

"It's a relief to have a quiet house for a day, isn't it?" she asked, eating her soup calmly. "I'll be glad when the election's over."

"Have you been here long?" he asked, although Beth had told him of Eliza's coming to Elmhurst.

"Only a short time. And you?"

"Two days," said he. "But where did you live before you came here?"

She shook her head.

"I wish you would answer me," he begged. "I have a reason for asking."

"What reason?" she demanded, suddenly serious again.

"Two people have never lived that were so near alike as you and Lucy Rogers."

"Indeed?"

"Will you show me your left arm?"

"No."

She was again studying his face.

"If you are Lucy Rogers you have a scar there —a scar where you burned yourself years ago."

She seemed frightened for a moment. Then she said:

"I have no scar on my left arm."

"Will you prove it?"

"No. You are annoying me. What did you say your name is?"

"Tom Gates."

She was thoughtful for a moment and then shook her head.

"I have never heard of you," she declared, positively, and resumed her eating.

Tom was nonplussed. One moment he believed she was Lucy, and the next told himself that it was impossible. This girl possessed man-

nerisms that Lucy had never exhibited in all the years he had known her. She was bold and unabashed where Lucy was shy and unassuming. This girl's eyes laughed, while Lucy's were grave and serious; yet they were the same eyes.

"Let me tell you about my lost Lucy," he said, with a glance at the unconscious Donald.

"Go ahead, if it will relieve you," she answered, demurely.

"She lived on a farm five miles from here, and she was my sweetheart. Her mother is blind and her father old and feeble. She worked for a dentist in the town and was accused of stealing a ring, and it nearly broke her heart to be so unjustly suspected. In order to make good the loss of the ring, a valuable diamond—I—I got into trouble, and Lucy was so shocked and distressed that she—she lost her head—became mad, you know—and left home during the night without a word to any one. We haven't been able to find her since."

"That's too bad," remarked Eliza Parsons, buttering her bread.

"About the time that Lucy went away, you ap-

peared at Elmhurst," continued Tom. "And in face and form you're the image of my Lucy. That is why I asked you to tell me where you came from and how you came here."

"Ah, you think I'm mad, do you?" asked the girl, with a quizzical smile. "Well, I'm not going to satisfy your curiosity, even to prove my sanity; and I'm not anxious to pose as your lost Lucy. So please pass the sugar and try to be sociable, instead of staring at me as if I scared you."

Tom passed the sugar, but he could not eat, nor could he tear himself away from this strange girl's presence. He tried again to draw her into conversation, but she showed annoyance and resented his persistence. Presently she went away, giving him an amused smile as she left the room —a smile that made him feel that this was indeed a case of mistaken identity.

In fact, Tom Gates, on sober reflection, knew that the girl could not be Lucy, yet he could not still the yearning in his heart whenever he saw her. His heart declared that she was Lucy, and his head realized that she could not be.

While he waited in the library for Mr. Forbes

to return from Fairview a man was shown into the room and sat down quietly in a corner.

He was a small, lean man, of unassuming appearance, with a thin face and gray eyes set close together. When he looked at Tom Gates he scarcely seemed to see him, and his manner conveyed the impression that he disliked to attract notice.

"Waiting for Mr. Forbes, sir?" asked Tom.

"Yes," was the quiet reply.

Suddenly it struck the young man that this might be the detective who called every evening to give his report, and if so Tom was anxious to talk with him. So he ventured to say:

"It's Mr. Burke, isn't it?"

The man nodded, and looked out of the window.

"I'm Tom Gates, sir."

"Yes; I know."

"You've seen me before?" asked the youth, astonished.

"No; I've heard of you. That's all."

Tom flushed, remembering his recent crime. But he was eager to question the detective.

"Have you heard anything of Lucy Rogers, Mr. Burke?"

"Not yet."

"Is there no trace of her at all?"

"A slight trace—nothing worth mentioning," said Mr. Burke.

For a few moments Tom sat in silence. Then he said:

"I thought I'd found her, day before yesterday."

"Yes?" There was little interest in the tone.

"There's a girl in the house, sir, one of the maids, who is the living image of Lucy Rogers."

"You ought to be able to identify her," suggested the detective, his gaze still out of the window.

"But they are not alike except in looks. Her form and face are identical with Lucy's. I was so sure that I begged her to let me see if there was a scar on her left arm; but she refused."

"Was there a scar on Lucy Rogers's left arm?"

"Yes, sir. Several years ago, when we were children, we were making candy in the kitchen and Lucy burned herself badly. It left a broad

scar on her left forearm, which she will bear as long as she lives."

"It is well to know that," said Mr. Burke.

"This girl," continued Tom, musingly, "says her name is Eliza Parsons, and she says it in Lucy's voice. But her manner is not the same at all. Eliza laughs at me and quizzes me; she is forward and scornful, and—and perfectly self-possessed, which Lucy could not be, under the circumstances."

"Have you seen her closely?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sir."

"And are still unable to decide who she is?"

"That's it, sir; I'm unable to decide. It's Lucy: and yet it isn't Lucy."

"Who is Eliza Parsons?"

"She refuses to say where she came from. But it seems she arrived at Elmhurst only a day or two after Lucy disappeared from home. It's that coincidence that makes me doubt the evidence of my own senses."

"Who hires the servants here?"

"I don't know, sir."

Mr. Burke abandoned the conversation, then, and confined his gaze to the landscape as it showed through the window. Tom busied himself addressing circulars of instruction to the Republicans who were to work at the polling places. This was Saturday, and the election was to be on the following Tuesday. The meeting at Fairview was therefore the last important rally of the campaign.

At dusk the party arrived from Fairview in the automobiles, the girls greatly delighted with the success of the meeting. They all followed Kenneth into the library, where the butler had just lighted the lamps. The evenings were getting cool, now, and a grate fire was burning.

Kenneth greeted Mr. Burke and introduced him to the young ladies, who begged to remain during the interview.

"We are all alike interested in Lucy Rogers, Mr. Burke," said the boy; "so you may speak freely. Is there any news?"

"Nothing of importance, sir, unless a clew has been found in your own house," replied the detective.

"Here at Elmhurst?" asked the astonished Kenneth.

"Yes. Tom Gates has seen a girl—one of your maids—who so strongly resembles Lucy Rogers that he at first believed she was the missing girl."

"I know," said Beth, quickly. "It's Eliza Parsons. But Tom was mistaken. He saw her in the dim light of a corridor, and the resemblance confused him."

"I've seen her since," remarked Tom, "and the likeness is really bewildering. It's only her manner that is different."

"When I first saw her, before Tom came, I was astonished at her resemblance to Mrs. Rogers," announced Beth. "I have never seen Lucy, but I know Mrs. Rogers, and it seemed to me that Eliza was exactly like her in features. Mr. Forbes and I first saw her riding in a buggy with Mr. Hopkins. That was before either of us knew she was employed at Elmhurst. You see she isn't one of the servants who come much in contact with the family; she does the mending and takes charge of the linen room."

Beth then related the manner in which they first noticed Eliza, and how they had discovered her to be a spy in the service of Mr. Hopkins.

The detective was much interested in the recital and seemed surprised that he had not been informed of this before.

"Of course," said Kenneth, "the girl is not Lucy Rogers. It is not possible they could be the same."

"Why not?" asked Mr. Burke.

"Well, Lucy was a gentle, sweet country girl, of little experience in life. Her nature was so susceptible, so very sensitive, that when she discovered Tom Gates, whom she loved, to be guilty of a forgery, she worried herself into an attack of brain-fever; or at least she became insane, reproaching herself for having driven the boy to this dreadful deed. Under the influence of her mania she wandered away from her home, and has not been seen since. That's the story of Lucy Rogers. Now look at Eliza Parsons. She appeared the very day after Lucy's disappearance, to be sure; but that proves they are not the same person. For Eliza is not demented. She is

a cold, hard woman of the world, in spite of her tender years. She is doing the work of an experienced spy, while any deceit was foreign to Lucy's nature. Instead of being plunged in grief Eliza is happy and gay, reckless of consequences and fully self-possessed. She is also well and healthy, to all appearances. Taking all these things into consideration, it is impossible to connect the two girls in any way—save the coincidence of personal resemblance."

Mr. Burke listened to this quietly, and then shook his head.

"Your arguments all tend to make me suspect that she is Lucy Rogers," he said, quietly.

For a moment there was an impressive silence, while everyone eagerly, inquiringly or doubtfully looked at the detective, according to their diverse acceptance of his statement.

"In pursuance of the task set me," began Mr. Burke, "I had met with such absolute failure to trace the missing girl that I began to suspect no ordinary conditions were attached to this case. In my experience, which covers many years, I have had occasion to study sudden dementia,

caused by shocks of grief or horror, and I have come to comprehend the fact that the human mind, once unbalanced, is liable to accomplish many surprising feats. Usually the victim is absolutely transformed, and becomes the very opposite, in many ways, of the normal personality. I imagine this is what happened to Lucy Rogers."

"Do you imagine that Lucy would try to deceive *me,* sir?" asked Tom, reproachfully.

"I am sure she doesn't know who you are," answered the detective, positively. "She doesn't even know herself. I have known instances where every recollection of the past was wiped out of the patient's mind."

There was another thoughtful pause, for the detective's assertions were so astonishing that they fairly overwhelmed his hearers.

Then Louise asked:

"Is such a case of dementia hopeless, Mr. Burke?"

"Not at all hopeless. Often, I admit, it develops into permanent insanity, but there are

many examples of complete recovery. Our first business must be to assure ourselves that we are right in this conjecture. I may be entirely wrong, for the unexpected is what I have been taught to look for in every case of mystery that has come under my observation. But I believe I have the material at hand to prove the personality of this Eliza Parsons, and after that I shall know what to do. Who employs your servants, Mr. Forbes?"

"Martha, my housekeeper, usually employs the maids."

"Will you send for her, please?"

Kenneth at once obeyed the request, and presently Martha entered the library.

She was a little, withered old woman, but with a pleasant face and shrewd but kindly eyes.

"Martha," said Kenneth, "did you employ the new linen maid, Eliza Parsons?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, apparently surprised at the question.

"This is Mr. Burke, Martha. Please answer any questions he may ask you."

"Yes, Master Kenneth."

"Did the girl bring any recommendations?" asked the detective.

Martha reflected.

"I do not think she did, sir."

"Are you accustomed to hiring maids without recommendations?" asked Mr. Burke.

"Oh, Eliza had a letter from my cousin, Mrs. Hopkins, who lives in Elmwood."

"Is Mrs. Hopkins your cousin?" asked Kenneth.

"Yes, sir. She were a Phibbs before she married Erastus, and my name is Phibbs."

"What did the letter from Mrs. Hopkins say?"

"It said she knew Eliza to be a clever and worthy girl, and if I had a place for her I couldn't do better than take her on. So I needed a linen maid and Eliza went right to work. Isn't she satisfactory, sir? Has she been doing anything wrong?"

"No. Please do not mention this interview to her at present, Miss Phibbs," said the detective. "That is all, I believe."

"Would you like to see Eliza?" asked Kenneth, when the housekeeper had retired.

"Not at present. I want to interview Mrs. Hopkins first."

"Tonight?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"I will go at once, with Mr. Forbes's permission."

"Certainly, sir," said Kenneth. "Shall we see you tomorrow?"

"Just as soon as I have accomplished anything."

"Would you like a horse or an automobile?"

"Your man may drive me to the town, sir, if it is convenient."

Kenneth gave the required order, and then Mr. Burke asked:

"How far are you prepared to go in this matter, sir?"

"In what way?"

"In expending money."

"Will any large expenditure be required?"

"I cannot say. But we may require the services and advice of an expert physician—a specialist in brain diseases."

"Do you know of one?" asked Kenneth.

"Yes; but he must be brought from Buffalo. It will be expensive, sir. That is why I ask if your interest in the girl warrants our going to the limit to save her."

Kenneth was thoughtful, while the girls looked at him expectantly and Tom Gates with visible anxiety.

"My original idea was merely to find the missing girl in order to relieve the anxiety of her blind mother," said young Forbes. "To accomplish that I was willing to employ your services. But, as a matter of fact, I have never seen the girl Lucy Rogers, nor am I particularly interested in her."

"I am," declared Beth.

"And I!"

"And I!" repeated Patsy and Louise.

"I think," said Uncle John, who had been a quiet listener until now, "that Kenneth has assumed enough expense in this matter."

"Oh, Uncle!" The remonstrance was from all three of the girls.

"Therefore," continued Mr. Merrick, "I pro-

pose that I undertake any further expense that may be incurred, so as to divide the burden."

"That's better!" declared Patsy. "But I might have known Uncle John would do that."

"You have my authority to wire the physician, if necessary, or to go to any expense you deem advisable," continued Mr. Merrick, turning to the detective. "We seem to have undertaken to unravel an interesting mystery, and we'll see it through to the end."

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Burke, and left them with a brief nod of farewell.

"Somehow," said Beth, "I've a lot of confidence in that little man."

"Why, he's a detective," replied Uncle John, with a smile, "and the chief business of detectives is to make mistakes."

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. HOPKINS GOSSIPS

The home of Representative Hopkins was not a very imposing edifice. It was a modest frame building standing well back in a little yard at the outskirts of the village, and Mrs. Hopkins did the housework, unaided, to save the expense of a maid. It never occurred to the politician, who had risen from the position of a poor stable-boy to one of affluence, to save his wife from this drudgery. To him poor Mary was merely one of his possessions, and it would have astonished him to know that her sharp tongue and irritable temper were due to overwork and neglect. The Honorable Erastus was not averse to champagne dinners and other costly excesses while at the state capital, and his fellow legislators considered him a good fellow, although rather lax in "keeping his end up." Moreover,

he employed a good tailor and was careful to keep up an appearance of sound financial standing. But his home, which he avoided as much as possible, had little share in his personal prosperity. Mary Hopkins's requests for new and decent gowns were more often refused than acceded to, and he constantly cautioned her to keep down expenses or she would drive them both to the poor-house.

The woman well knew that Erastus could afford to keep her in luxury, if he would, but some women are so constituted that they accept their fate rather than rebel, and Mary Hopkins lived the life of a slave, contenting herself with petty scoldings and bickerings that did nothing to relieve her hard lot.

She had little interest in politics and resented the intrusion of the many who came to the house to see and consult with her husband during the tiresome political campaigns. On these occasions Mr. Hopkins used the sitting-room as his office and committee headquarters, but this did not materially interfere with his wife's comfort, as she was usually busy in the kitchen.

On this Saturday evening, however, they had an early supper and she finished her dishes betimes and sat down to darn stockings in the sitting-room. Erastus had hurried away to a meeting of his henchmen in the town, and would not be home until after his wife was in bed.

So she was rather surprised when a timid knock sounded upon the door. She opened it to find a little, lean man standing upon the porch.

"Mrs. Hopkins?" he asked, quietly.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Your husband asked me to come here and wait for him. It's important or I wouldn't disturb you."

"Well, then; come in," she replied, tartly. "Thank the Lord this thing is nearly over, and we'll have a few weeks of peace."

"It is rather imposing on you," remarked the man, following her to the sitting-room, where he sat down with his hat in his hands. "A political campaign is trying to everybody. I'm tired out and sick of the whole thing myself."

"Then why don't you chuck it," she retorted,

scornfully, "and go to work makin' an honest living?"

"Oh, this is honest enough," he said, mildly.

"I don't believe it. All them secret confabs an' trickery to win votes can't be on the square. Don't talk to me! Politics is another name for rascality!"

"Perhaps you're right, ma'am; perhaps you're right," he said, with a sigh.

She looked at him sharply.

"You don't belong in Elmwood."

"No, ma'am; I'm from beyond Fairview. I've come to see your husband on business."

She sniffed, at that, but picked up her darning and relapsed into silence. The little man was patient. He sat quietly in his chair and watched her work.

His mildness disarmed Mary Hopkins. She was not especially averse to having him sit there. It relieved the loneliness of her occupation. On occasions she loved to talk, as Erastus had long ago discovered; and this visitor would not try to shut her up the way Erastus did.

"You don't often get out, ma'am; into society, and such like," ventured the caller, presently.

"What makes you think that?" she demanded.

"A woman can't keep a house neat and trim like this, and be a social gadder," he observed.

"You're right about that," she returned, somewhat mollified. "If I was like them girls up at Elmhurst, fussin' round over politics all the time, this house would go to rack an' ruin."

"Oh, them!" he said, with mild scorn. "Them girls 'll never be housekeepers."

"Not for a minute," she affirmed.

There was another pause, then; but the ice was broken. A subtle sympathy seemed established between the two.

"What do you think of 'Rast's chances?" she asked, presently, as she threaded new cotton into her needle.

"I guess he'll win. He's worked hard enough, anyhow."

"Has he?"

"Yes; 'Rast's a good worker. He don't leave any stone unturned. He's up to all the tricks o' the trade, is 'Rast Hopkins!"

Here he began shaking with silent laughter, and Mrs. Hopkins looked at him curiously.

"What are you laughing at?" she inquired, with a sniff of disdain.

"At—at the way he come it over the gals up at Elmhurst. 'Rast's a pretty slick one, he is!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, settin' that 'Liza to watch 'em, and tell all they does. Who'd a thought of it but 'Rast Hopkins?"

"I don't see anything mighty funny about that," declared Mrs. Hopkins, contemptuously. "The girl's too pert and forward for anything. I told 'Rast not to fool with her, or she'd make him trouble."

"Did you, now!" exclaimed the man, wonderingly.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Hopkins, pleased to have made an impression. "I suspected there was something wrong about her the morning she came to the house here. And she changed her name, too, as brassy as you please."

"Well, I declare!" said the visitor. "Did you know her before that, Mrs. Hopkins?"

"Why, I didn't exactly know her, but I seen her workin' around Miss Squiers's place many a time, and she didn't seem to 'mount to much, even then. One day she stole a di'mond ring off'n old Miss Squiers and dug out, and I told Nancy then—Nancy's young Miss Squiers—that I'd always had my suspicions of the hussy. She hid the ring in a vase on the mantle and they found it after she was gone."

"Well, well! I didn't know that about her," said the man, looking with admiration at Mrs. Hopkins.

"That's why I told 'Rast not to have any truck with her, when she came here bright and early one morning and asked for work."

"Oh, she came here, did she?"

"While I was gettin' breakfast. She said her name was Eliza Parsons, an' she was looking fer a job. I told her I knew her record an' to get out, and while we was arguin' 'Rast come out and took a hand in the talk. She laughed and flirted with him outrageous, and said she was a stranger in these parts, when I'd seen her many a time at Miss Squiers's."

"What was her name then?" asked the man.

"I think it was Rosie—or Lucy, or something —. Anyhow, it wasn't Eliza, and that I'll swear to. But the girl laughed at me and made such silly smiles at 'Rast that he told me to shut up, 'cause he had a use for her in politics."

"Well, well!" repeated the visitor. "Just see how stories get twisted! I heard you gave the girl a letter to your cousin Martha."

"Well, I did. 'Rast wanted to get her in at Elmhurst, to watch what Forbes was doing to defeat him, so he made me write the letter. But how'd you know so much about this girl?" she inquired, with sudden suspicion.

"Me? I only know what Mr. Hopkins told me. I'm one of his confidential men. But he never said how he happened to find the girl, or what he knew about her."

"He didn't know nothing. He'd never seen her 'till that morning when she came here. But he said she was clever, and she is, if pertness and a ready tongue counts for cleverness. I suppose he pays her for what she tells him about Forbes, but he'd better save his money and fight

on the square. I don't like this tricky politics, an' never did."

"I don't either," declared the man. "But I'm in it, and can't get out."

"That's what 'Rast says. But some day they'll put him out, neck and crop, if he ain't careful."

"Is the girl Eliza much use to him?"

"I can't say. He drove her over to Elmhurst that morning, and he drives over two or three evenings a week to meet her on the sly and get her report. That may be politics, but it ain't very respectable, to my notion."

"Well, the campaign is nearly over, Mrs. Hopkins."

"Thank goodness for that!" she replied.

The visitor sat silent after this, for he had learned all that the poor gossiping woman could tell him. Finally he said:

"I guess your husband's going to be late."

"Yes; if he ain't more prompt than usual you'll have a long spell of waiting."

"Perhaps I'd better go over to the hotel and look him up. I have to get back to Fairview to-night, you know."

"Do as you please," she answered carelessly.

So Mr. Burke, for it was the detective, bade her good-night and took his leave, and it was not until after he had gone that Mary Hopkins remembered she had forgotten to ask him his name.

"But it don't matter," she decided. "He's just one o' 'Rast's politicians, and I probably treated the fellow better than he deserved."

CHAPTER XVIII

ELIZA PARSONS

On Sunday morning Mr. Burke again appeared at Elmhurst, and told Kenneth he wanted an interview with Eliza Parsons.

"I don't want you to send for her, or anything like that, for it would make her suspicious," he said. "I'd like to meet her in some way that would seem accidental, and not startle her."

"That is rather a hard thing to arrange, Mr. Burke," said the boy, with a smile.

"Why, I think not," declared Louise. "It seems to me quite easy."

"That's the woman of it, sir," laughed Kenneth; " if it's a question of wits her sex has the advantage of us."

"What do you propose, miss?" asked the detective, turning to Louise.

"I'll have Martha send the girl into the garden to gather flowers," she replied; "and you can

wander around there and engage her in conversation."

"Excellent!" he exclaimed. "Can this be arranged now?"

"I'll see, sir."

She found Martha and asked her to send Eliza Parsons for some roses and chrysanthemums, which were in a retired place shut in by evergreen hedges.

"One of the other maids will know the garden better," suggested the housekeeper.

"But I wish Eliza to go."

"Very well, Miss Louise."

From an upper window the girl watched until she saw Eliza Parsons leave the house with a basket and go into the retired garden she had chosen. Then she returned to the library for Mr. Burke and led him toward the same place.

"Eliza is just beyond that gap in the hedge," she said, and turned away.

"Wait a moment, please," he said, detaining her. "On second thought I would like you to come with me, for your tact may be of great assistance. Have you spoken much with Eliza?"

"Not at all, I think. Beth has talked with her, but I have scarcely been near her since she came here."

"You are willing to come?"

"I shall be glad to."

"The poet Saxe," said Mr. Burke, walking through the gap beside Louise, "has never been properly appreciated by his countrymen, although since his death his verses are in greater demand than while he lived. Do you care for them?"

"I don't know Saxe very well," she answered, observing that they were approaching a place where Eliza was bending over a rose-bush. "But one or two of his poems are so amusing that they linger in my memory."

Eliza turned at the sound of their voices and gave them a quick glance. But the next moment she resumed her occupation of cutting roses.

"The man's greatest fault was his habit of punning," remarked the detective, watching the girl's form as he drew nearer. "It is that which blinded his contemporaries to his real talents. What exquisite roses, Miss Merrick! May I ask for one for my button-hole?"

"Yes, indeed!" she replied, pausing with him just beside Eliza. "Will you cut that bud yonder, for Mr. Burke, my dear?"

The maid silently obeyed and as the detective took the flower from her hand he said:

"Why, isn't this Eliza Parsons?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, carelessly.

"Don't you remember me, Eliza?"

She seemed a little surprised, but answered promptly:

"No, sir."

"I'm William Burke, your mother's cousin. How did you leave your brother Harry, and have you heard from Josephine lately?"

The girl gave him a startled look and shrank back.

"Why, how nice!" cried Louise. "I did not know you knew Eliza's family, Mr. Burke."

"Yes, she is one of my relatives, and came from Roanoke, Virginia. Isn't that correct, Eliza?"

"Yes, sir—no! I—I don't remember!" she said, in a low tone.

"Don't remember, Eliza? That is strange."

The girl stared at him half frightened, and drew her hand over her eyes with a gesture of bewilderment.

"I hope, my dear, you are not going to be like your mother," said Mr. Burke, gently. "My poor cousin Nora was subject to a strange lapse of memory at times," he remarked to Louise. "She always recovered in time, but for days she could remember nothing of her former life—not even her own name. Are you ever affected that way Eliza?"

She looked up at him pleadingly, and murmured in a low voice:

"Let me go! Please let me go!"

"In a moment, Eliza."

Her hands were clasped together nervously and she had dropped her basket and scissors on the path before her. The man looked intently into her eyes, in a shrewd yet kindly way, and she seemed as if fascinated by his gaze.

"Tell me, my dear, have you forgotten your old life?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Poor girl! And you are trying to keep this a secret and not let anyone know of your trouble?"

Suddenly she started and sprang away, uttering a cry of terror.

"You're trying to trap me," she panted. "You know my name is not Eliza Parsons. You—you want to ruin me!"

From the position in which they stood in the corner of the garden, with high hedges behind the maid, and Mr. Burke and Louise blocking the path in front, there was little chance of escape. But she looked around wildly, as if about to make the attempt, when Louise stepped forward and gently took Eliza's hand in her own.

"Mr. Burke is a good man, my dear, and means well by you," she said in her sweet, sympathetic tones. "He shall not bother you if you are afraid of him."

"I—I'm not afraid," said Eliza, with a resumption of her old manner and a toss of her head.

The detective gave Louise a look which she thought she understood.

"Will you finish cutting these roses, Mr. Burke?" she asked, with a smile. "Eliza and I are going to my room. Come, my dear," and without waiting for a reply she led the girl, whose hand was still clasped in her own, along the path.

Eliza came willingly. Her manner was a little defiant at first, but when Louise drew her unobserved to the side entrance and up the staircase she grew gentle and permitted the other girl to take her arm.

Once in her room with the strange maid, Louise locked the door quietly and said to her companion with a cheerful smile:

"Now we are quite alone, and can talk at our ease. Take that low chair, dear, and I'll sit here."

Eliza obeyed, looking wistfully into the fair face of her new friend.

"You are very pretty, Eliza; and I'm sure you are as good as you're pretty," announced Louise. "So you must tell me about yourself, and whether you are happy here or not. From this

time on I'm going to be your friend, you know, and keep all your secrets; and I'll help you all I can."

This rambling speech seemed to impress Eliza favorably. She relaxed somewhat from the tense alertness that was habitual with her, and looked at the other girl with a softened expression.

"I'm afraid you won't be much interested in me," she replied, "but I need a friend—indeed I need a friend, Miss Louise!"

"I'm sure you do."

"At first I thought I could do without one. I felt I must stand alone, and let no one suspect. But—I'm getting puzzled and bewildered, and I don't know what to do next."

"Of course not. Tell me about it, dear."

"I can't; for I don't know, myself." She leaned forward in her chair and added, in a whisper: "I don't even know who I am! But that man," with a shudder, "tried to trap me. He said he knew Eliza Parsons, and there *is* no Eliza Parsons. It's a name I—I invented."

"I think I understand," said Louise, with a little nod. "You had to have a name, so you took that one."

"Yes. I don't know why I am telling you this. I've tried to hide it all so carefully. And perhaps I'm wrong in letting this thing worry me. In the main, I've been very happy and content, lately; and—I have a feeling I was not happy before—before—"

"Before what, dear?"

The girl looked at her steadily and her face grew red.

"Before I lost my memory."

For a few moments they sat silently regarding one another, the expressive features of Louise showing a silent sympathy.

"Have you really lost your memory?" she asked.

"Absolutely. Think of it! I wakened one morning lying by the roadside, and shivering with cold. I had on a simple gray dress, with no hat. The sun was just rising, and no one was near. I examined myself with wonder, for I had no idea who I was, or how I came there.

There was no money in my pocket, and I had no jewels. To keep warm I began walking along the road. The scenery was all new to me; so far as I knew I had never been in the place before.

"The birds were singing and the cows mooed in the meadow. I tried to sing, too, for my heart was light and gay and I was happy. By and bye I came to a town; but no one seemed to be awakened because it was yet so early. As I walked down the street I saw smoke coming from one of the chimneys, and it suddenly occurred to me that I was hungry. I entered the yard and went around to the back door. A woman was working in the kitchen and I laughed joyfully and wished her a good morning. She was not very pleasant, but it did me good to talk with her; I liked to hear my own voice and it pleased me to be able to talk easily and well. She grudgingly gave me something to eat and then bade me begone, calling me by some strange name and saying I was a thief. It was then that I invented the name of Eliza Parsons. I don't know why, but it popped into my head and I

claimed it for my name and have clung to it ever since."

"Have you no idea what your real name is?" asked Louise, greatly interested in this terse relation.

"I have no idea of anything that dates beyond that morning," replied Eliza. "The first time I looked in the mirror I saw a strange face reflected there. I had to make my own acquaintance," she added, with one of her bright laughs. "I suppose I am between seventeen and twenty years of age, but what my life was during past years is to me a sealed book. I cannot remember a person I knew or associated with, yet things outside of my personal life seem to have clung to me. I remembered books I must have read; I can write, sing and sew—I sew remarkably well, and must have once been trained to it. I know all about my country's history, yet I cannot recollect where I lived, and this part of the country is unknown to me. When I came to Elmhurst I knew all about it and about Mr. Forbes, but could not connect them with my former life."

"How did you happen to come here?" asked Louise.

"I forgot to tell you that. While I was arguing with the woman, who was a Mrs. Hopkins, her husband heard us and came out into the kitchen. He began to question me about myself and I gave any answer that came into my head, for I could not tell him the truth. It pleased me to hear my voice, I seemed to have a keen sense of the humorous, and if I said anything at all clever, I laughed as heartily as anyone. My heart was light and free from all care. I had no worries or responsibilities at all. I was like the birds who see the sunshine and feel the breeze and are content to sing and be happy.

"Mr. Hopkins saw I was wholly irresponsible and reckless, and he decided to use me to spy upon the people here at Elmhurst and report to him what they said and did. I agreed to this readily, prompted by a spirit of mischief, for I cared nothing for Hopkins and had nothing against Mr. Forbes. Also Hopkins paid me money, which I had sufficient knowledge to realize was necessary to me.

"Oh, how happy and gay I was in those first few days! There was not a thought of the past, not an ambition or desire of any sort to bother me. Just to live seemed pleasure enough. I enjoyed eating and sleeping; I loved to talk and laugh; I was glad to have work to occupy me—and that was all! Then things began to happen that puzzled me. The man Hopkins declared he could not trust me because I had once been a thief, and I wondered if he could speak truly. I resented the thought that I may once have been a thief, although I wouldn't mind stealing, even now, if I wanted anything and could take it."

"Oh, Eliza!" gasped Louise.

"It sounds wicked, doesn't it? But it is true. Nothing seems to influence me so strongly as my own whims. I know what is good and what is bad. I must have been taught these things once. But I am as likely to do evil as good, and this recklessness has begun, in the last few days, to worry me.

"Then I met a young man here—he says his name is Tom Gates—who called me his dear

Lucy, and said I used to love him. I laughed at him at first, for it seemed very absurd and I do not want him to love me. But then he proved to me there was some truth in his statement. He said his Lucy had a scar on her left arm, and that made me afraid, because I had discovered a scar on my own arm. I don't know how it got there. I don't know anything about this old Lucy. And I'm afraid to find out. I'm afraid of Lucy."

"Why, dear?"

"I cannot tell. I only know I have a horror of her, a sudden shrinking whenever her name is mentioned. Who was she, do you suppose?"

"Shall I tell you?" asked Louise.

"No—no! Don't, I beg of you!" cried Eliza, starting up. "I—I can't bear it! I don't want to know her."

The protest was passionate and sincere, and Louise marvelled at the workings of this evidently unbalanced intellect.

"What would you like to do, dear?" she inquired.

"I'd like to remain Eliza Parsons—always.

I'd like to get away from *her*—far away from anyone who ever heard of that dreadful Lucy who frightens me so. Will you help me to get away, to escape to some place where no one will ever be able to trace me?"

"Do you think you would be happy then?"

"I am sure of it. The only thing that makes me unhappy now is the horror that this past life will be thrust upon me. I must have had a past, of course, or I shouldn't be a grown woman now. But I'm afraid of it; I don't want to know anything about it! Will you help me to escape?"

She looked eagerly at Louise as she asked this pitiful question, and the other girl replied, softly:

"I will be your friend, Eliza. I'll think all this over, and we will see what can be done. Be patient a little while and as soon as I find a way to free you from all this trouble I'll send for you, and we'll talk it over together."

"Will you keep my secret?" demanded Eliza, uneasily.

Louise glanced at the door that communicated with Beth's room. It stood open, but Eliza had not noticed that, as it was behind her. Just now

a shadow cast from the other room wavered an instant over the rug, and Louise's quick eyes caught it.

"I promise to keep your secret, dear," she said earnestly.

The two girls rose and stood facing each other. Louise kissed the beautiful Eliza and whispered:

"Here is one thing for you to remember—that we are always to be true friends, from this time forward. If anyone annoys you, come to me, and I will protect you."

"Thank you, Miss Louise," said Eliza, and then she went away to her own room in a quieter and more thoughtful mood than usual.

When she had gone Louise ran to the door communicating with Beth's room, and to her satisfaction found both her cousins, with Kenneth, Uncle John and Mr. Burke, seated in a group where they must have overheard all that had been said.

"Well!" she cried, eagerly, "did you hear? And what do you think of it all?"

"It's Lucy Rogers, sure enough," said Kenneth.

Louise looked at Mr. Burke.

"It is the most singular case that has ever come under my observation," stated that gentleman. "The girl is perfectly sane, but she has suffered a strange lapse of memory. I have two alternatives to advise. One is to telegraph at once for a specialist. The other is to permit the girl to go away, as she suggests. She will be happier to do so, I am sure."

"Oh, no!" cried the girls.

"She owes a duty to her parents and friends, as well as to herself," said Kenneth, "and I see no reason why she should be unhappy in the future as Lucy Rogers."

Mr. Burke merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Please wire for the specialist at once," said Uncle John.

CHAPTER XIX

PATSY INDULGES IN EAVESDROPPING

Miss Patricia Doyle awakened at daybreak next morning with a throbbing toothache. She wasn't accustomed to such pains and found it hard to bear. She tried the application of a hot-water bag, and the tooth ached harder; she tried a cold compress, and it jumped with renewed activity. So she dressed herself and walked the floor, with the persistent ache as an intimate companion.

She tried to find a cavity in the tooth, but it seemed perfectly sound. Evidently she had caught cold and the wicked molar was signaling the fact.

To be patient under the torture of a toothache was a virtue Patsy did not possess. Louise and Beth, to whom she appealed, were sorry for her, but could not relieve the pain. After breakfast

Uncle John ordered her to drive to town and see a dentist.

"Have it pulled, or filled, or something," he said. "The dentist will know what to do."

So James drove Patsy to town, where they arrived about nine o'clock this Monday morning. The only dentist at Elmwood was Dr. Squiers, so the girl ran up the flight of stairs to his office, which was located over the hardware store.

The pain had eased on the journey, and now the thought of having the offending tooth pulled was weighing heavily upon Patsy's mind. The door of Dr. Squiers's office stood ajar, and she hesitated whether to enter or not.

The dentist's reception room was divided from his operating room by a thin wooden partition, and as Patsy was deciding whether to employ Dr. Squiers's services or not she heard high words coming from behind the partition, and the voice was that of the Honorable Erastus Hopkins.

Softly she slid into the outer room and sank into a chair.

"But you're the clerk of the election, Squiers;

you can't deny that," Hopkins was saying in a blustering, imperious voice.

"That's true enough," answered the dentist, more calmly.

"Then you've got the registration books in your possession."

"I admit that," was the reply. "But you're asking me to incriminate myself, 'Rast. If the thing was discovered it would mean prison for both of us."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried the irascible Hopkins. "These things are done every day, and no one's the wiser for it. It's merely a part of the political game."

"I'm afraid, 'Rast," said Dr. Squiers. "Honest Injun, I'm afraid."

"What are you 'fraid of? I've got the other clerks all fixed, and they'll stand by us. All you need do is to add these sixty-six names to the registration list, and then we'll vote 'em without opposition and win out."

Patsy gave a gasp, which she tried to stifle. The toothache was all forgotten.

"Where are these men?" inquired Dr. Squiers, thoughtfully.

"They're over at the mill. Marshall got 'em from all over the country, and they'll be set to work today, so everything will seem reg'lar."

"Where do they sleep and eat?" inquired the doctor.

"Forty sleep in Hayes's barn, and the other twenty-six in the stock loft over the planing mill. Marshall's got a commissary department and feeds 'em regular rations, like so many soldiers. Of course I'm paying for all this expense," acknowledged Mr. Hopkins, somewhat regretfully.

"And do you suppose these sixty-six votes will turn the scale?" asked Dr. Squiers.

"They're sure to. We finished the last canvass yesterday, and according to our figures Forbes has about eighteen votes the best of us. That's getting it down pretty close, but we may as well make up our minds we're beaten if we don't vote the men over at the mill. Marshall could have got me a hundred if necessary, but

sixty-six is more than enough. Say Forbes has twice eighteen for his plurality, instead of eighteen; these sixty-six for me would wipe that out and let us win in a walk."

When Hopkins ceased there was a brief silence. Perhaps Dr. Squiers was thinking.

"I simply *must* have those votes, Doc," resumed the Representative. "It's the only way I can win."

"You've made a bungle of the whole campaign," said Squiers, bitterly.

"That's a lie. I've done a lot of clever work. But these infernal city girls came down here and stirred up all the trouble."

"You made a mistake pushing that sign issue. The girls beat you on that."

"If it hadn't been signs it might have been something worse. But I ain't beaten yet, Doc. Squiers. This deal is going to win. It's a trick the boarding-school misses won't understand until after they've cut their eye-teeth in politics."

"There's a pretty heavy penalty against false registration," observed the dentist, gloomily.

"There's no penalty unless we're found out, and there ain't the ghost of a chance of that. The books are in your hands; I got all the clerks fixed. Not a question will even be raised. I know it. Do you suppose I'd risk state's prison myself, if I wasn't sure?"

"Look here, 'Rast," said Squiers, doggedly, "you're making a tool of me in this campaign. Why should I be used and abused just to elect Erastus Hopkins, I'd like to know. You sacrificed me when I might have been Sheriff."

"You're well paid for that, Doc."

"And now you want me to put my neck in a noose for your advantage. I won't do it, 'Rast, and that's a fact."

Mr. Hopkins coughed.

"How much, Doc?" he inquired.

The dentist was silent.

"State the figure. But for mercy's sake don't bleed me any more than you can help. This fight has cost me a pretty penny already."

"I don't want your money," growled Squiers.

"Yes you do, Doc. I know you better than

you know yourself. The trouble with you is, you'll want too much."

Squiers laughed bitterly.

"Is Marshall to be trusted?" he asked.

"Of course. If he said a word he'd lose his job as manager. Marshall's all right. There's nothing to worry about, Doc."

Patsy's tooth wasn't aching a bit. But her heart was throbbing as madly as the tooth ever did, and fortunately there was no pain connected with the throbbing—only joy.

"It ought to be worth two thousand dollars, 'Rast," said the dentist.

"What! In addition to all other expenses?"

"Why, man; it means the election. It means your whole future. If you're defeated now, you're a back number in this district, and you know it."

"It's too much, Doc. On my word it is."

"It's too little, come to think of it. I'll make it three thousand."

"Doc!"

"If you don't close with me, 'Rast, by the jumping Jupiter, I'll make it four thousand,"

cried the dentist, with exasperation.

"Say twenty-five hundred, Doc."

"Right on the nail. Give me your check here —this minute."

"And you'll enter the names in the books?"

"Before you leave the office. Have you got the list?"

"Yes; in my pocket," said Mr. Hopkins.

"Then make out your check and I'll get the books."

There was a stir behind the partition and a sound of chairs scraping the floor. Patsy slid out the door and flew down the stairs at the imminent danger of breaking her neck. James was seated in the buggy outside, engaged in rumination.

Patsy bounded in beside him and startled him.

"Drive for your life!" she cried. "Drive for home!"

He whipped up the spirited horse and they dashed away. Presently the man asked, with a grin:

"Did it hurt much, Miss Patsy?"

"Did what hurt, James?"

"The tooth pullin', Miss Patsy."

"The tooth wasn't pulled," answered the girl, sweetly. "It didn't need it, James. The only thing that was pulled was the Honorable Erastus's leg."

CHAPTER XX.

PRICKING A BUBBLE.

When Patsy arrived home she called a council of war and related the conversation she had overheard in the dentist's office.

"It isn't a very nice thing to do—listening to a private conversation," said the girl, "but when I discovered they were going to play such a trick on Kenneth I couldn't help eavesdropping."

"I think you were justified," declared Mr. Watson, with a grave face; "for this matter is very serious indeed. Tomorrow is election day, and if a toothache hadn't carried you to the dentist's office Kenneth would surely have been defeated."

"And we'd never have known how it happened," declared Uncle John.

"But can the plot be foiled at this late date?" inquired Louise, anxiously.

"I think so," said Mr. Watson. "Dr. Squiers was correct in saying that such a crime was a

state's prison offense. Our discovery of it will send both Erastus Hopkins and Dr. Squiers to prison. Probably Mr. Marshall, the manager of the mill, will go with them."

"Oh, I don't like that!" exclaimed Patsy.

"Nor do I," added Kenneth. "It would be a sad beginning to my political career to send three such men to prison. I'd like to avoid it, if I can."

"Perhaps it may be quietly arranged," said the lawyer. "If they knew you had discovered the false registration of these men, they would never dare vote them."

"How would it be to send Mr. Burke, the detective, over to the mill to talk with Mr. Marshall?" suggested Beth.

"That is an excellent plan, and would be very effective in determining the manager to abandon the plot."

"I'll go and see Hopkins myself," announced Uncle John. "I know how to manage men of his sort."

"Very good," approved the lawyer, "and I'll see Squiers."

"If you do," said Patsy, "just ask him to sign

a paper saying that Lucy Rogers was falsely accused of stealing the ring, and that his mother found it in a vase, where she had forgotten she put it."

"I'll do that," replied Mr. Watson. "And I'll get the sixty dollars back that Tom Gates paid him. I'll make it a condition of our agreeing not to prosecute the man."

"It looks as if we were going to win the election," said Uncle John in a pleased voice. "If Hopkins was driven to such methods as stuffing ballot-boxes, he must know very well he's defeated."

"He acknowledged it to Dr. Squiers," said Patsy, gaily. "We have eighteen sure majority, and perhaps more."

"It's likely to be more," predicted Uncle John.

"I suppose congratulations are in order, Ken," said Louise.

"Not yet, cousin," he replied. "Wait until tomorrow night; and then don't congratulate me, but the campaign managers—three of the nicest and cleverest girls in existence!"

"You're right, my boy," declared Uncle John. "If you pull through and take your seat in the Legislature, you'll owe it all to these girls."

"That is true," smiled the lawyer. "Kenneth was badly beaten when you arrived."

Of course our girls were very happy at receiving this praise, but more pleased to realize they had actually been of service to their boy friend. They believed that Kenneth would prove a good Representative and carry out his promises to the voters; and if he did, that his political career was assured.

Mr. Burke appeared in the afternoon with a telegram from Dr. Hoyt, the specialist, saying that he would be at Elmwood on the noon train Wednesday. His engagements prevented him from coming any sooner, and in the meantime Mr. Burke advised keeping a close watch on Eliza Parsons, to see that she did not run away.

"I'll attend to that," said Louise, quickly. "Eliza and I are friends, and I'll take care of her."

"Aren't you going to the polls?" asked Patsy.

"No, dear; why should I go? Our work is done now, isn't it?"

"Well, I'm going to the polls and work for every vote," declared Patsy. "I shan't be happy unless Kenneth gets more than eighteen majority."

When the Hopkins plot was explained to Mr. Burke, the detective readily agreed to go to Fairview and see Mr. Marshall. As no time was to be lost he was sent over in an automobile, and arrived at the mill just before the hour for closing.

The next day being election day the mill was to be closed, and the manager was very busy in his office when Mr. Burke requested to see him.

"You will have to come around Wednesday," said Marshall, fussily. "I can't attend to you now."

"I'm sorry to disturb you, sir," replied the detective, "but my business won't wait until Wednesday."

"What is it about, sir?"

"About the election."

"Then I won't be bothered. The election

doesn't interest me," said Mr. Marshall, turning away.

"Very well, I'll call Wednesday, sir, at the jail."

Marshall gave him a quick look.

"Who are you, sir?" he asked.

"John Burke, a detective."

The manager hesitated a moment.

"Come in, Mr. Burke," he said.

"I represent the Forbes interests," said the detective, seating himself in the private office, "and it has come to our notice that Dr. Squiers has permitted sixty-six fraudulent registrations to be entered on the books. These sixty-six men are supposed to have been imported by you and are now working at this mill."

"This is all nonsense!" protested the manager, growing pale.

"Forty men are sleeping in a near-by barn, and twenty-six in the stock-room of the mill," added Mr. Burke.

"That isn't criminal, sir."

"No, indeed. The criminal act is their false registration, so far," said the detective, blandly.

"But mark you, sir; if an attempt is made to vote those men tomorrow, I shall arrest you, as well as Mr. Hopkins and Dr. Squiers."

"This is preposterous, sir!" blustered the manager. "There will be no attempt made to vote them."

"I am quite sure of it," was the reply. "You may thank Mr. Forbes for warning you in time. He wished to save you, and so sent me here."

"Oh, he did!" Mr. Marshall was evidently surprised. "May I ask how you discovered all this?" he added.

"I am not at liberty to give you the details. But I may say the exposure of the plot occurred through Mr. Hopkins's own carelessness. I've seen lots of crooked politicians, Mr. Marshall, but this man is too reckless and foolish ever to be a success. He deserves to be defeated and he will be."

The manager was thoughtful.

"This is all news to me," he declared. "I needed these extra men to help me fill a contract on time, and so employed them. I had

no idea Hopkins and Squiers would try to vote them tomorrow."

This was a palpable falsehood, but Mr. Burke accepted the lame excuse without question.

"You are a valuable man in this community, Mr. Marshall, and Mr. Forbes seemed to think the Hopkins people were trying to get you into trouble. Of course it would have caused trouble had these men voted."

"Of course, Mr. Burke. I'm much obliged to Mr. Forbes for warning me."

"You'll find the next Representative a very agreeable man to get along with, Mr. Marshall. Good day, sir."

"Good day, Mr. Burke."

When the detective had gone Mr. Marshall sat in a brown study for a few moments. Then he summoned his superintendent and said:

"Please ask the men to assemble in the yard before they go home. I want to have a word with them."

The request came just in time, for the men were already beginning to stream out of the

mill. They waited good-naturedly, however, grouping themselves in the big yard.

Then Marshall mounted a lumber pile and addressed them briefly.

"Boys," he said, "I told you all, a week or so ago, I'd like you to vote for Hopkins for Representative, as I believed his election would result in more work for the mill and better wages for the employes. But I've been watching matters pretty closely, and I've changed my mind. Forbes is a coming man, and he'll do more for us all than Hopkins could. So every man who is entitled to vote will please me best by voting for Kenneth Forbes."

There was a cheer at this, and when it subsided, the manager continued:

"Of course none of the new men, who were not properly registered, have a right to vote at this election, and I command them to keep away from the polls. Anyone who attempts to vote illegally will be promptly arrested."

This caused more cheering, for the workmen had suspected that the new hands would be voted illegally, and they were relieved to find that it

was a "square deal all 'round," as one of them remarked with satisfaction.

Meantime, Uncle John was having a "barrel of fun" with Mr. Hopkins.

The little millionaire, although a man of simple and unobtrusive ways, was a shrewd judge of human nature. Moreover he had acquired a fund of experience in dealing with all sorts of people, and was delighted to meet Mr. Hopkins under the present circumstances.

So he drove over to Elmwood and was fortunate to find Mr. Hopkins in his "office" at home, where he was busily engaged instructing his "workers" in their duties at the polls.

At sight of Mr. Merrick, whom he knew by this time to be a friend of Kenneth Forbes, staying at Elmhurst, the politician scented some pending difficulty, or at least an argument, and was sufficiently interested to dismiss his men without delay.

"Ah, this is Mr. Merrick, I believe," began Mr. Hopkins, suavely. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Considerable, if you're disposed," answered

the other. "For one thing I'd like to hire Eliza Parsons away from you."

"Eliza Parsons!" gasped the Representative.

"Yes, your spy. Election's about over and you won't need her any longer, will you?"

"Sir, do you mean to insult me?" asked the Honorable Erastus, indignantly.

"By no means. I thought you were through with the girl," said Uncle John with a chuckle.

Mr. Hopkins was distinctly relieved. With a full recollection of his wicked schemes in his mind, he had feared some more important attack than this; so he assumed a virtuous look, and replied:

"Sir, you wrong me. Eliza Parsons was no spy of mine. I was merely trying to encourage her to a higher spiritual life. She is rather flighty and irresponsible, sir, and I was sorry for the poor girl. That is all. If she has been telling tales, they are untrue. I have found her, I regret to say, inclined at times to be—ah —inventive."

"Perhaps that's so," remarked Uncle John, carelessly. "You're said to be a good man, Mr.

Hopkins; a leetle too honest and straightforward for a politician; but that's an excusable fault."

"I hope I deserve my reputation, Mr. Merrick," said Erastus, straightening up at this praise. "I do, indeed, try to live an upright life."

"I guess so, Mr. Hopkins, I guess so. You wouldn't try, for instance, to encourage false registration."

"Sir!"

"Anything wrong, Mr. Hopkins?" asked Uncle John, innocently.

Erastus looked at his visitor tremblingly, although he tried to control his nerves. Of course Mr. Merrick couldn't mean anything by this chance shot, so he must be thrown off the scent.

"You have a disagreeable way of making remarks, sir, and I have no time to listen to foolish speeches. Tomorrow is election day and I've a good many details yet to arrange."

"No chance of you're getting in jail, is there?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I only thought that if you'd done anything liable to make trouble, you'd have to arrange your affairs for a long spell in jail. Politicians sometimes make mistakes. But you're such an honest man, Mr. Hopkins, you couldn't possibly go crooked."

Mr. Hopkins felt shaky again, and looked at his tormentor earnestly, trying to discern whether there was any real knowledge beneath this innuendo. But Uncle John met his gaze with a cheerful smile and continued:

"I guess you've got a hard fight ahead of you. My young friend Forbes is trying to get elected himself, and you can't both win."

"Oh, yes; Forbes," said Erastus, trying to regain his accustomed ease. "A worthy young man, sir; but I'm afraid his chances are slim."

"Are they, now?" asked Uncle John, pretending a mild interest.

"Pretty thin, Mr. Merrick. Our majority is too great to overcome."

"What do you think your majority will be? About sixty-six?"

Mr. Hopkins gave a start and turned red.

"About sixty-six," he repeated, vacantly, trying to decide if this was another chance shot.

"Yes; about sixty-six mill hands."

The cat was out of the bag now. Hopkins realized that Merrick had some knowledge or at least suspicion of this plot. He tried to think what to do, and it occurred to him that if his visitor positively knew anything he would not act in this absurd manner, but come straight to the point. So he ignored the speech, merely saying:

"Anything else, sir?"

"No," replied Uncle John; "I'll go home, I guess. Folks 'll be expecting me. Sorry Forbes hasn't got that sixty-six mill hands; but Doc. Squiers probably registered 'em all right, and they'll probably vote for Hopkins."

"Wait a moment, sir!" cried Erastus, as Uncle John was turning away. "That speech demands an explanation, and I mean to have it."

"Oh, you do? Well, I don't object. You may not know it, but Squiers has registered sixty-six non-voters, and I want to know whether you're prepared to give half of them

to Forbes, or mean to keep them all for yourself."

"If Squiers has made false registrations he must stand the consequences. I want you to understand, sir, that I do not countenance any underhand dealing."

"Then it's all off? You won't vote the mill hands?"

"Not a man shall vote who is not properly registered."

"I'm glad to hear it, Mr. Hopkins. Perhaps you can get that twenty-five hundred back. I don't think Squiers has cashed the check yet."

The Honorable Erastus gave a roar like a wild bull, but Uncle John had walked quietly out and climbed into his buggy. He looked back, and seeing Mr. Hopkins's scowling face at the window returned a pleasant smile as he drove away.

Mr. Watson had just finished his interview with the dentist when Uncle John picked him up at the corner. The lawyer had accomplished more than the other two, for he had secured a paper exonerating Lucy Rogers and another in-

criminating the Honorable Erastus Hopkins, as well as the sixty dollars paid by Tom Gates. The dentist was thoroughly frightened, but determined, now that the conspiracy was defeated, that the man who had led him to the crime should not escape in case he was himself arrested. So he made a plain statement of the whole matter and signed it, and Mr. Watson assured Squiers immunity from arrest, pending good behavior. The man had already cashed Hopkins's check, and he knew the Representative could not get the money away from him, so after all the dentist lost nothing by the exposure.

It was a jolly party that assembled at the dinner-table in Elmhurst that evening.

"You see," explained Uncle John, "the thing looked as big as a balloon to us at first; but it was only a bubble, after all, and as soon as we pricked it—it disappeared."

CHAPTER XXI

THE "RETURNS" FROM FAIRVIEW

Election day dawned sunny and bright; but there was a chill in the air that betokened the approach of winter.

Uncle John had suggested serving coffee to the voters at the different polling places, and Kenneth had therefore arranged for a booth at each place, where excellent coffee was served free all day long. These booths were decorated with Forbes banners and attracted a great deal of comment, as the idea was a distinct innovation in this district.

"You wouldn't catch Hopkins giving anything away," remarked one farmer to another. "'Rast is too close-fisted."

"Why, as fer that," was the reply, "the thing is done to catch votes. You know that as well as I do."

"S'pose it is," said the first speaker. "I'd ruther my vote was caught by a cup of hot coffee on a cold day, than by nothin' at all. If we've got to bite anyhow, why not take a hook that's baited?"

Patsy and Beth made the rounds of the polling places in an automobile covered with flags and bunting, and wherever they appeared they were greeted with cordial cheers.

Mr. Hopkins was noticeable by his absence, and this was due not so much to his cowardice as to an unfortunate accident.

Neither Squiers nor Hopkins knew just how their secret had leaked out, for Patsy's presence in the dentist's office had not been disclosed; so each one suspected the other of culpable foolishness if not downright rascality. After Uncle John's visit Erastus stormed over to Squiers's office and found his accomplice boiling with indignation at having been trapped in a criminal undertaking.

As the two men angrily faced each other they could not think of any gentle words to say, and Dr. Squiers became so excited by the other's

reproaches that he indulged in careless gestures. One of these gestures bumped against the Honorable Erastus's right eye with such force that the eye was badly injured.

The candidate for re-election, therefore, wakened on election morning with the damaged optic swollen shut and sadly discolored. Realizing that this unfortunate condition would not win votes, Mr. Hopkins remained at home all day and nagged his long-suffering spouse, whose tongue was her only defence.

The Representative had promptly telephoned to Marshall at Fairview telling him not to vote the men as arranged. He was not especially charmed with the manager's brief reply:

"Don't be alarmed. We're not *all* fools!"

"I guess, 'Rast," remarked Mary Hopkins, looking at her damaged and irritable husband with a blending of curiosity and contempt, "that you're 'bout at the end of your rope."

"You wait," said Erastus, grimly. "This thing ain't over yet."

The day passed very quietly and without any especial incident. A full vote was polled, and

by sundown the fate of the candidates had been decided. But the counting seemed to progress slowly and the group assembled around the telephone in Kenneth's library thought the returns would never arrive.

The Republican Committee had given Mr. Forbes a table showing what the vote of each precinct should be, according to their canvass.

The first report was from Elmwood, and showed a gain of seventeen over the estimate. Patsy was delighted, for she had worked hard in Elmwood, and this proved that her efforts had been successful. Then came a report from Longville, in Jefferson County. It showed a gain of forty-three votes for Hopkins, and a consequent loss for Forbes. This was a startling surprise, and the next advice from a country precinct in Washington County showed another gain of twelve for Hopkins.

The little group of workers looked at one another with inquiring eyes, and Patsy could hardly refrain from crying.

The butler announced dinner, but only Louise and Mr. Watson could eat anything. The others

were too intent on learning their fate and could not leave the telephone.

It seemed queer that the precincts furthest away should be first to respond, but so it was. Jefferson County returns began to come in rapidly, and were received in dismal silence. Hopkins gained four here, seven there, and twenty-two in another precinct.

"It looks," said Kenneth, quietly, "like a landslide for Hopkins, and I wonder how our Committee was so badly informed."

"You see," said Uncle John, "voters won't usually tell the truth about how they've decided to vote. Lots of them tell both sides they're going to vote their way. And people change their minds at the last minute, too. You can't do much more than average the thing by means of a canvass."

By nine o'clock, complete returns from the part of Jefferson County included in the Eighth District showed a net gain of one hundred and eight for Hopkins—a lead that it seemed impossible to overcome. Washington County was not so bad. Incomplete returns indicated a

slight gain for Hopkins, but not more than a dozen votes altogether.

"Everything now depends upon Dupree and Fairview," announced Kenneth, "but I can't get any connection with them yet. We won in Elmwood, anyhow, and Hopkins isn't ahead more than a hundred and sixty as the thing stands now. Cheer up, girls. A defeat won't hurt us much, for we've all made a good fight. Better get to bed and sleep, for you're tired out. We'll know all about everything in the morning."

But they would not move. Disappointment unnerved them more than victory would have done. They resolved to wait until the last returns were in.

"Telephone, sir," said Tom Gates.

Kenneth picked up the receiver.

"Here's Dupree," he said. "Our majority over Hopkins is two hundred and eleven. Let's see, that's a gain of seventy-four votes, my dears."

"Hooray!" cried Patsy, delightedly. "I don't care a rap now, what happens. Old Hopkins won't have much to crow over if—"

"Wait a minute," said Kenneth. "Here's Fairview, at last!"

They held their breaths and watched his face. Kenneth flushed red as he held the receiver to his ear, and then grew white. He turned around to the expectant group and Beth knew from the sparkle in his eyes what had happened.

"Fairview's six precincts give us six hundred and forty-one majority," announced the boy, in an awed tone. "That's a gain of nearly four hundred!"

They gazed at him in silent wonder. Then Uncle John rose slowly and took the boy's hand.

"That means we've won—and won in a walk," said the little man. "Kenneth, we congratulate you."

Patsy's face was buried in her handkerchief, and Beth's great eyes were bright with unshed tears. But Louise laughed her soft, musical laugh and remarked:

"Why, I knew all the time we would win. We had the better candidate, you see."

"And the best campaign managers," added Uncle John, with a proud smile.

"That may be true," admitted Beth. "But the thing that really won the fight was Patsy's sore tooth."

CHAPTER XXII

THE AWAKENING

James and Mr. Burke met the great specialist in brain diseases at the noon train on Wednesday and drove him to Elmhurst.

Dr. Hoyt was a handsome, gray-haired man, with kindly eyes and a distinguished manner. When he was ushered into the library the young ladies were attracted by the physician at once, and from the first glance were inspired by confidence in his powers. Yet Dr. Hoyt spoke rather doubtfully of the case in hand.

"These cases are not so rare as you might suppose," he said; "yet no two of them are exactly alike. Usually the recovery is slow and tedious; but recovery is not always assured. In some instances, however, the memory is absolutely restored, and from what Mr. Burke has explained to me of Lucy Rogers's history this

is what we may expect now. Or else we must trust to time or an accident to awaken her dormant mental faculties. The case is so interesting that I should like, with your permission, to make an experiment which can result in no harm if it does not succeed."

"We put the matter entirely in your hands, sir," said Uncle John. "Act as you think best."

"I thank you," replied Dr. Hoyt, bowing. Then he turned to the girls. "Which of you young ladies has won the friendship of Lucy Rogers?" he asked.

Louise answered that she and Eliza Parsons had become good friends.

"Will you assist me?" asked the physician.

"Willingly, sir."

"I wish to send the girl into a deep sleep, to render her unconscious without her suspecting my intention, or realizing the fact. Can you suggest a way to do this?"

Louise tried to think.

"What means will you employ, sir?" she asked.

"There are many ways to accomplish this. I

prefer to administer a powerful sleeping potion. Have you any confectionery or bon-bons at hand?"

"Yes, indeed. I have just received a fresh box of bon-bons from New York. But I'm not sure I can induce Eliza to eat candy."

"Then let us prepare the potion in various ways. But you must be careful, Miss Merrick, not to make a mistake and take the dose yourself."

Louise laughed.

"I'll be careful, sir," she promised.

The two then retired to perfect their plan, and in an hour every arrangement was complete.

Louise went to her room, donned a wrapper, and bandaged her head. Then she summoned Martha and asked the housekeeper to send Eliza Parsons to sit with her in the darkened room, as she was suffering from a headache.

The maid came at once, to all appearances, as happy and careless as ever. After expressing her sympathy she asked what she could do.

"Just sit down and keep me company, dear,"

replied Louise. "I'm not very bad, but I'm restless and can't sleep, and I want you to talk to me and amuse me."

Eliza laughed.

"That is easy, as far as talking is concerned," she said. "But to amuse you, Miss Louise, may be more difficult."

But the girls found a topic of conversation in the election, in which Eliza was much interested, and they chatted together for an hour or so before Louise made any move to consummate her plot.

"I hope my foolish reports to Mr. Hopkins did no harm to Mr. Forbes," Eliza was saying. "I really had little to tell him of your conversation or movements."

"You did no harm at all, for Mr. Forbes was elected," replied Louise. Then she said, carelessly:

"Martha has sent me this pitcher of lemonade, and I don't care for it. Won't you drink a glass, Eliza?"

"No, thank you," she replied, shaking her head. "I never drink lemonade."

"Then have one of these sandwiches?"

"I'm not hungry, Miss Louise"

Louise sighed. Both the lemonade and the sandwiches had been "dosed" by Dr. Hoyt. Then she picked up the box of bonbons that was beside her.

"But you will eat some candy, dear. Every girl likes candy."

"I don't seem to care for it," said Eliza carelessly.

"Just one piece, to please me," coaxed Louise, and selected a piece from the box with dainty care. "Here, my dear; you'll find this sort very nice."

Eliza hesitated, but finally reached out her hand and took the bonbon. Louise lay back in her chair and closed her eyes, fearing their eagerness might betray her. When after a time she opened them again Eliza was slowly rocking back and forth and chewing the confection.

Dr. Hoyt's first suggestion had been best. The potion had been prepared in several ways to tempt Eliza, but the candy had been the effectual bait.

Louise felt a glow of triumph, but managed to continue the conversation, relating in an amusing way the anxiety of the Elmhurst folks when the first returns seemed to indicate the election of Hopkins.

Eliza laughed once or twice, her head resting upon the back of her chair. Then the words of Louise began to sound dreamy and indistinct in her ears. The chair rocked with less regularity; soon it came to a stop, and Eliza was peacefully sleeping in its ample depths.

Louise now rose softly and rang her bell. Footsteps approached, and a knock came upon the door. She admitted Dr. Hoyt, Mr. Burke, and two servants.

The physician approached the sleeping girl and gently lifted the lids of her eyes. Then he nodded with satisfaction.

"There was no suspicion on her part? She made no struggle—no attempt to evade unconsciousness?" he asked.

"None at all, sir," replied Louise. "She ate the bon-bon, and was asleep before she realized it."

"Excellent!" said the doctor. "We will now place her in her own room, upon her bed, while Mr. Burke and I drive over to her former home to complete our arrangements."

"Won't she waken?" asked Louise.

"Not until tomorrow morning, and when she does I hope for a complete restoration of her memory."

Beth went with Dr. Hoyt to the Rogers farm, because she knew Mrs. Rogers. It was necessary to break the news to the poor, blind woman gently, but Beth's natural tact stood her in good stead. She related the story of the search for Lucy, the discovery that one of the maids at Elmhurst resembled the missing girl, and the detective's conclusion that Eliza Parsons was none other than Lucy Rogers, who was suffering from a peculiar mental aberration and had forgotten every detail of her former life.

Mrs. Rogers followed the tale with intelligent understanding, and her joy at the discovery of her wandering child was only tempered by the fear that Lucy would never know her mother

again or be content to remain in her humble home.

Then Dr. Hoyt took up the conversation and related the many instances of complete recovery that had come under his observation.

"I am adopting heroic methods in this case," said he, "but I have reasonable hopes of their success. Your child doubtless became mentally confused while under this roof. How many hours she wandered, we do not know, but it could not have been long before she lay down by the roadside and fell asleep. When she awakened her mind was a blank as regards her identity and former history. Now, in order to effect a recovery, I have reversed these experiences with her. She is at present plunged into a deep sleep, under the influence of narcotics that have rendered her brain absolutely inactive. It is really a state of coma, and I wish her to waken in this house, amid the scenes with which she was formerly familiar. By this means I hope to induce her mental faculties to resume their normal functions."

Mrs. Rogers accepted this proposal with calm-

ness and a confidence in the physician that was admirable. Old Will trembled with nervous excitement, and was so "flustered" by the importance of the experiment that Dr. Hoyt decided to give him a quieting potion.

Lucy's room was prepared in the exact manner in which she had left it, and presently the visitors drove back to Elmhurst.

In the evening the doctor made the journey a second time, accompanying the unconscious form of Lucy, which was attended by a maid Louise had sent with her.

The girl was undressed and put to bed in her own room, and then everyone except Dr. Hoyt returned to Elmhurst.

The physician sat late in conversation with the blind woman and old Will, and when they retired for the night he lay down upon a lounge in the little living-room. The question of fees or of comfort was wholly ignored by the specialist at the moment. His sole interest was in his remarkable case.

Mrs. Rogers rose at daylight and with old Will's assistance prepared the breakfast. The

little table was set in the humble living-room, and the fragrant odor of coffee pervaded the house. Dr. Hoyt drank a cup and then stepped out upon the little porch, taking a position of observation by the window.

"All right, Nell," muttered old Will, his knees knocking together, in spite of himself.

Mrs. Rogers rose quietly and walked to the foot of the stairs.

"Lucy! Lucy!" she called.

"Yes!" came a faint reply.

"Breakfast is ready!"

Then the two old people sat in suppressed excitement for what seemed to them an age. But the physician, calmly stationed at the window, knew it was not very long.

Presently a light step sounded upon the stairs and Lucy came into the room.

"Good morning, mother dear!" she said, a new, sweet tenderness in her voice. And then she knelt and kissed the woman upon her brow.

The doctor looked at his watch.

"I must be going," he muttered, turning away. "There's time for me to catch the early train."

THE END

WILLSON'S BOOK STORE
Stationery and Office Supplies
15 W. Main Street Alhambra, Cal.